



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07488988 6

LENOX LIBRARY

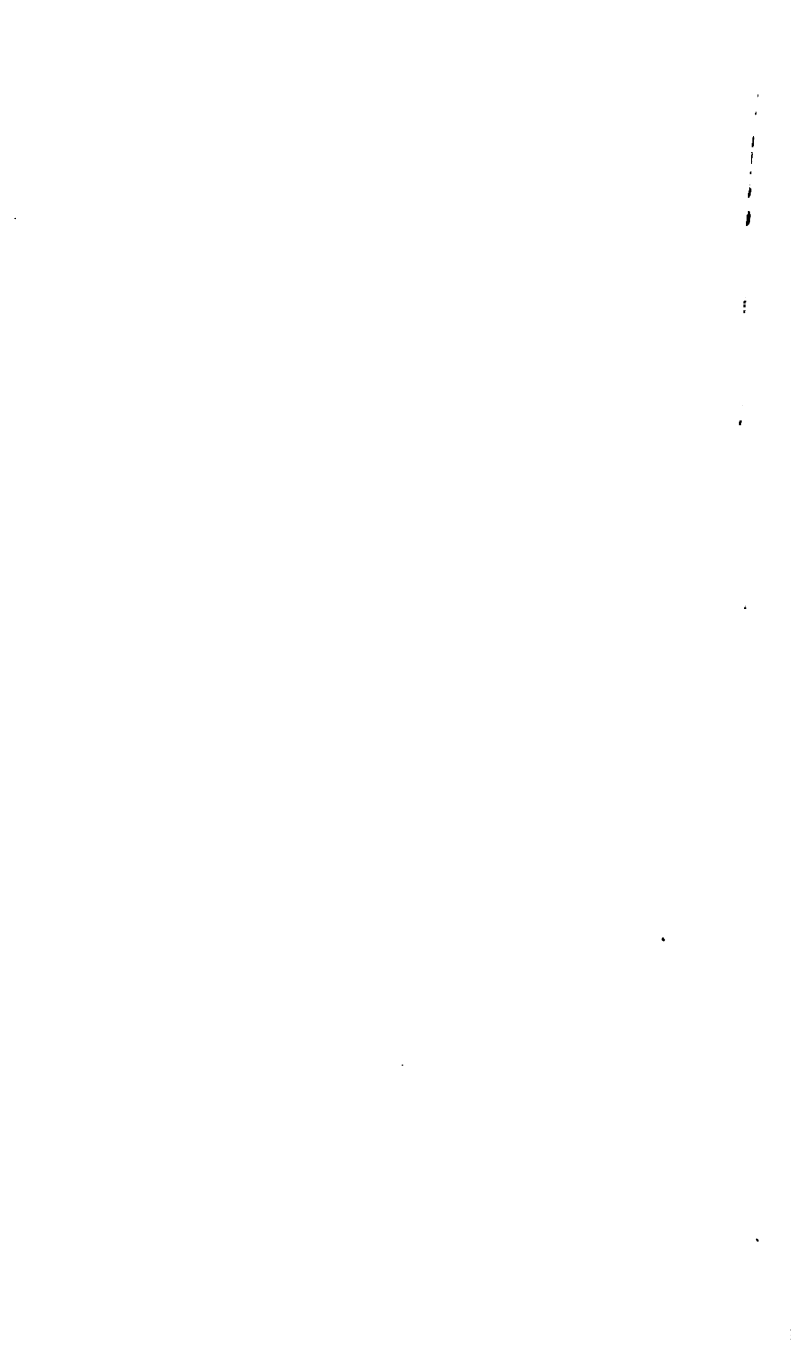


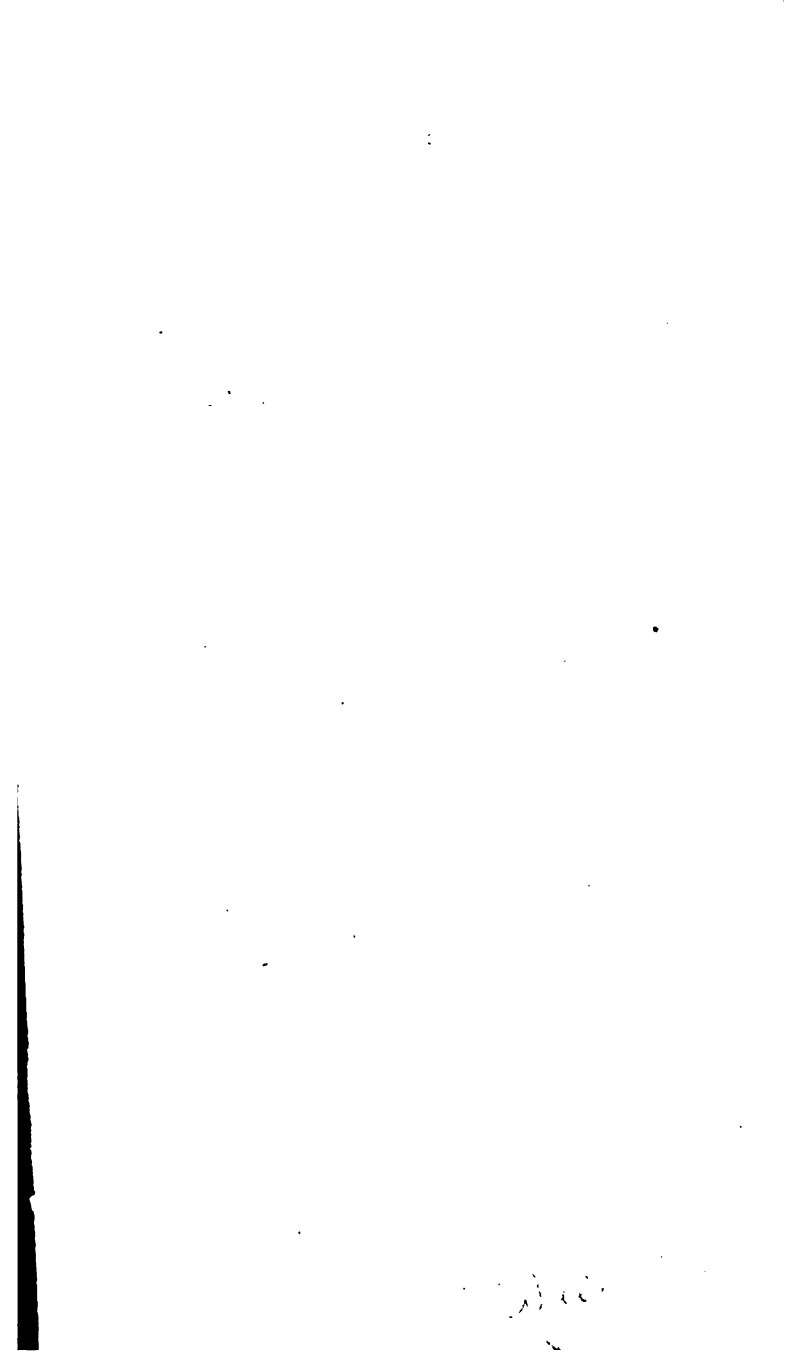
Psychich Collection.  
Presented in 1878.









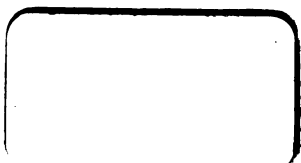




ENOX LIBRARY



Chickinck Collection.  
presented in 1878.



\*NCLF

Will











THE  
YOUTH  
OF  
SHAKSPEARE.

*Robert Folkestone Williams*

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SHAKSPEARE AND HIS FRIENDS."

All the world's-a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players,  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
And *one man in his time plays many parts.*

SHAKSPEARE.

Triumph, my Britain ! thou hast *one* to show  
To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe.

BEN JONSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :  
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,  
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

---

1839.

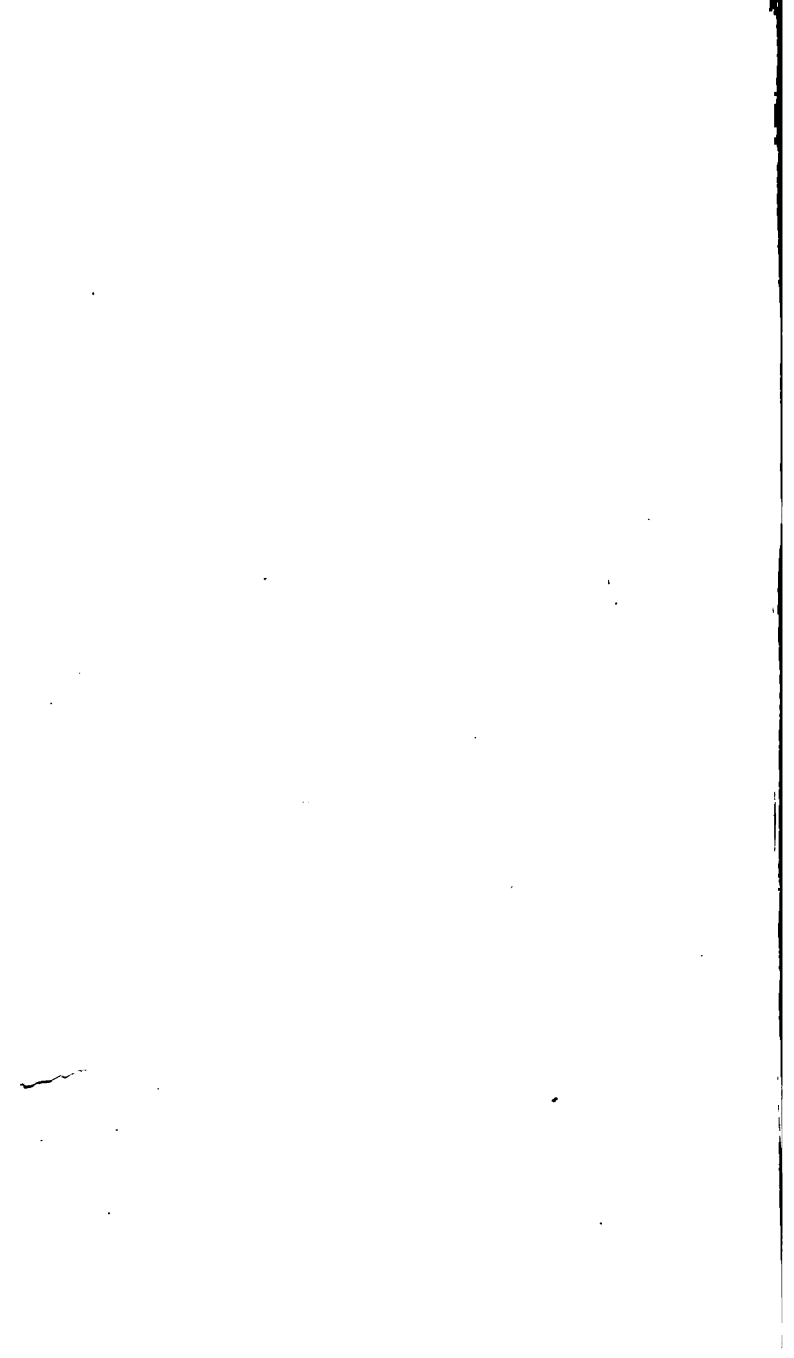
M.D





PRINTED BY W. WILCOCKSON, ROLLS BUILDINGS FETTER LANE.

TO  
THE ADMIRERS  
OF  
"Monte-Tong's Shakspeare,"  
AND OF THE OTHER ILLUSTRIOUS SPIRITS OF  
THE GOLDEN AGE OF ENGLAND,  
THESE VOLUMES,  
WITH TRUE HUMBLINESS,  
AND ENTIRE DEVOTEDNESS TO THE SUBJECT,  
ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,  
BY  
THEIR FELLOW-WORSHIPPER,  
AND VERY OBEDIENT SERVANT,  
THE AUTHOR.



## PREFACE.

ADDRESSED BY THE AUTHOR, WITH A SUITABLE PROPER RESPECT IN HIM,  
TO HIS SINGULAR GOOD FRIEND,

THE COURTEOUS READER.

---

METHINKS an apology is necessary, for adventuring on a subject of the extreme difficulty essayed in these volumes ; but the cause of my entering on so notable ambitious a task, will, perhaps, hold me excused in some measure ; for this was it :—I had noted with exceeding sorrowfulness, and a becoming indignation, divers small biographers, muddle-headed commentators, and insolent cyclopædia scribblers, with as scarce a commodity of truth as of wit, garnishing their silly conceits of the noblest heart and brain that ever laboured for universal humanity, with a prodigal store of all manner of despicable vileness, and wretched impudent folly ; and having had much deep study, and moreover, being possessed of a very boundless love of the subject, I thought I would strive, as far as lay within the compass of my humble ability, to put to shame these pitiful traducers, and set up before the world a statue of this High Priest of Nature, as he ought to be entitled, as like as might be unto the wondrous admirableness of his natural gifts.

I doubt hugely there has ever been a writer of so catholic a reputation as this so slandered character; for, as I firmly believe, it is scarce possible to point out any one part of the huge globe, where some faint whisper of him hath not penetrated. On the desertest rock, in the savagest country, in all extremes of climate, and among the goodliest and gloomiest features of land and sea, somewhat of the countless great heaps of comfort he hath left us, hath had its exquisite sweet influence. In what remote wilderness hath the missionary set up his dwelling, which knoweth not, in his lighter hours, the cheerful piety of his matchless preaching?—Over which inhospitable towering mountain, doth the traveller seek a path, that hath not heard, to beguile the way of its weariness, the welcome remembrance of his infinite wit? And over what far distant ocean hath the sea-boy strained his gaze, that never caught from such lofty gallery, snatches of the inimitable music of his everlasting tuneful verse? There are no such places. He hath adventured wide and far; and his stream of purest English hath flowed from the gentle Avon, through every monstrous sea that dasheth its violent, fierce billows against the walls of the globe: and it is drunk with a like delicate rare freshness as at its humble source, on the banks of the gigantic Mississippi, the mighty Ganges, and on those of their in good time, as glorious rival, the Darling.

Amongst the living, there existeth no sign of any such greatness. Every succeeding generation it seemeth to increase, whilst such examples as had undisputed supremacy before it made itself manifest, have since wrapped their antique cloaks about them, and been content with humbler places. The shades of Sophocles, Æschylus, Euripides, Menander, and Aristophanes, are stirred from their long deep lethargy by wondrous memorials of the wool-stapler's son of Stratford uttered within

the ruin which was once their "Globe," by some adventurous tourist from an island that never had name or existence in their memories : and so their masters in arms yet pupils in learning the haughty Romans, rise from their desolate theatres marvelling exceedingly to hear there proclaimed in all that appertaineth to excellence in the writing of Tragedy and Comedy the undisputable omnipotence of a Briton.

Thus, in his national proper apparelling goeth he so famously abroad, but in a foreign dress he is scarce less revered, for the principal nations of Europe have strove to make his excellence as familiar with them as was possible, and have turned his English into as eloquent language of their own as they had at their commandment. By these means, the Spaniard, the Italian, the Frenchman, and the German, have got him into their friendly acquaintance. But of these only the Germans can be said either to know him thoroughly, or appreciate him with a proper affection. These excellent worthy persons do love him with all their hearts—study him so intently, they will not let the slightest of his manifold graces to escape without the full measure of admiration it meriteth and do so much make of him the general talk, as though all Germany were but Stratford-upon-Avon, and her sole glory no other than William Shakspeare. I have ventured to style him the High Priest of Nature, and truly, not without proper warrant. He is the chief interpreter of her mysteries, and the sovereign pontiff of her universal church, wherever the beautiful is felt, or the intellectual understood ; and Nature, who gave unto him his surpassing attributes, receiveth back, in a myriad of exhaustless channels, as I have insufficiently noted, the divine excellence that came of her giving. Since he hath ministered at her altar there hath been no schism as to her doctrine, nor sign of dispute of her authority ; for he so put her religion into lan-

guage and action, that wherever there is enlightened humanity, there must ever remain the most earnest loving deep-hearted devotedness. In this capacity, it is as utter foolishness to attempt drawing up an inventory of the riches hoarded in the treasures of the deep, as to seek to particularise, with any thing nigh upon faithfulness, the prodigal amount of good he hath caused to be distributed to mankind. As a benefactor, 'tis vain to look for his peer—as a philanthropist, no one hath lived with such profit to his fellows. The legacy which he left in trust to Time for the universal benefit, hath this peculiar property, that the more of it is disposed of, the more abundantly will it increase, and so rapidly doth it multiply itself as it getteth to be spread abroad, that it may, without any colour of exaggeration, be said, it is a benefaction that must embrace all space and all eternity.

Whilst endeavouring to exhibit something that approaches to the true character of the man, I have also sought to portray the principal characteristics of the age on which he conferred such marvellous honour. Perchance some may think that these volumes are worthy only of that sort of credit a mere romance can look for ; but let them be assured there is more of history in these pages than divers books purporting to be histories can boast of, and whenever they hold not Truth by the hand they tread as nigh upon her heels as may be. Mayhap too, others may look on divers passages as savouring in no slight prominence of over-boldness in the writer, but, in very truth, it is nought else but the daring which love inspires, and ought, it is respectfully urged, in no case to be considered as coming of any other source. Of the imperfectness of the elaborate picture I have essayed, I am as conscious as any person that breathes, but I doubt not amongst all liberal kind hearts I shall find such charitable constructions put on my deficiency, as may induce them to allow that the performance,

humble as it may be, hath not been altogether unprofitable. This I have been the more induced to look for from the generous encouragement afforded to "Shakspeare and his Friends" by such critics and scholarly persons who have taken it in hand, who both publicly and privately have bestowed on it their commendation with such exceeding bounteousness as I had not dared to expect. That the praise so generally given applied much more to the subject than its treatment I cannot help but believe; but let that be as it may, I will ever seek what means I have at my disposal, to prove how earnestly I strive for the desert in which it ought to have originated.

Doubtless, it would be but fitting of me here, to make some apology for publishing these works out of their proper order, as the present should have preceded its predecessor; but methinks I cannot do better than leave the fault to be dealt with by the reader as he shall think fittest--hoping it may not be found a matter of such heinousness as to deprive the offender of some excusing, particularly as each is a distinct work, complete in itself. If there exist no other objection, I doubt not, despite their irregular starting, they will now run their race together as fairly and as gallantly withal, as can be expected of them.

There hath been some stir lately made concerning of the orthography of the ever-honoured name of our "Sweet Swan of Avon." On that point it is only necessary here to say that it was customary with divers notable persons of the age of Elizabeth, to write their names in more than one form, just as it took their fantasy, proof of which will be discovered in the letters of the time, wherein Raleigh sometimes signeth himself "Rawley" Lord Burleigh hath some three or four ways of spelling his name, and others do the like sort of thing; therefore, to find a variation in the autographs of the illus-



trious Shakspeare is in no manner strange. The orthography here adhered to, hath the recommendation of being that which the great Bard employed in the latter period of his life, when it is supposed he must have settled it to his liking ; is moreover the same that was used by the choicest of his friends, who doubtless, had the best means of knowing his humour in it, and hath been made familiar to us, in consequence of its adoption by the most learned of his editors, critics, and scholars in this, and in all other countries, who, so it is presumed, ought to be the properest guides to follow in such a matter.

Here beginneth the Story of

## THE YOUTH OF SHAKSPEARE.

---

### CHAPTER I.

All was this Land ful filled of Faerie,  
The Elf-Quene with hire jolie company  
Daunsed full oft in many a grene mede,—  
This was the old opinion as I rede.

CHAUCER.

The vallies rang with their delicious strains,  
And pleasure revelled on those happy plains.

CHALKHILL.

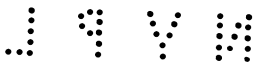
What if my lordinge doo chaunce for to miss me,  
The worst that can happen his cudgell will kiss me.

TRAGICALL COMEDYE OF APIUS AND VIRGINIA.

OH ! what a beauteous night was that time  
honoured, twenty-third of April, in the year of our  
Lord one thousand five hundred and sixty-four !  
The air was clear as any chrystal, and the wind  
just shaking the fragrance from the young blos-  
soms, as it swept along to make music in the fresh  
leaves of the tall trees, did create such harmony  
and sweetness therein, that nothing could have ap-  
peared so delectable, save the star-bestudded sky  
above, wherein the lady moon was seen to glide

with so silvery a brightness, that the sapphire heavens, the flowery earth, and the sparkling water, were apparelled in one mantle of the delicatest light. Peradventure so fair a night hath never been seen before or since; yet, of such bountiful beauty as it was throughout, there was one spot wherein its exquisite rare attractions were heaped together with so prodigal a hand, that the place, for the exceeding pleasantness of its aspect, must have been like unto that famous garden of Paradise, that held our first parents in their primitive innocence and happiness.

It was a low meadow field, marked by sundry declivities and inequalities, whereon a goodly shew of all manner of spring flowers were sleeping in the moonlight, even to the very waves of that right famous river the Avon, which was flowing along in all its refreshing loveliness, at its margin. Trees were here and there of divers kinds, garmented in their newest livery of green—a row of alders—a clump of beeches—a solitary oak—a shady coppice were stretching far and wide in one direction; and hedges of hawthorn and elder, interspersed with crab, wild-plum, and towering elms, would intersect the country in others. Close at hand was the town of Stratford, with the tall spire of the church, and the quaint eaves of the houses distinctly visible. Here stood the mansion of one of its persons of worship. There the more modest dwelling of an



industrious yeoman. At one place was the cottage of the sturdy labourer; in another the tenement of the honest miller, whilst, as the eye stretched out to the distance, other buildings might be faintly seen, which doubtless marked the situations of the neighbouring villages.

But, although signs of habitation were thus plentiful, of man or woman not one was there in sight; for this especial reason, all manner of honest folk had laid them down to sleep long since. Little could be seen of live things, excepting perchance a water-rat swimming upon the Avon, or, mayhap, a fold of sheep on the adjoining farm; or heard, save the tinkle of the sheep bells, or the bark of the shepherd's dog, occasionally responded to by some dog afar off; or the rushing of the water at the mill wheel, or the croaking of the frogs among the rushes, or the hooting of an owl as she passed by, intent on a mousing expedition to the nearest barn; and these sounds made as excellent sweet music as ever poet did delight to hear. Certes this was just such a scene, and these the very properest accompaniments for awakening in the heart that profound sympathy with nature which the few, to whom such feeling is familiar, give expression to, in sentiments that partake of the same beauty and immortality as the source whence they spring. All at once a new and unfamiliar sound came floating upon the air. It was faint and indistinct—a mere murmur, yet

musically soft and low. Gradually it grew upon the ear, as a blossom opening to the sunshine. A gentle harmony became distinguishable : then came tones of such exquisite melodiousness, it was ravishing to listen to them. At last voices, seeming in some number, were readily heard, and then, words becoming audible, they were at last distinctly repeated in the following order :—

“ We come from the violet's azure cells,  
 We come from the cowslip's golden bells,  
 From the hawthorn's odorous bloom we fly—  
     From the dewy eaves  
     Of the primrose leaves,  
 From the daisy's blushing buds we hie :  
 And fill the air with sounds and sights  
     As though to earth all Heaven was streaming,  
 More sweet than lovers' stolen delights,  
     More bright than aught loved maid is dreaming.  
 We come from the snowdrop's pallid head,  
 We come from the heather's lowly bed,  
 From the wild-bee's haunt and the wood-lark's home ;  
     From the grassy couch  
     Where the lev'rets crouch,  
 And the coney hides :—we come ! we come ! ”

Whilst this roundelay was being sung, there appeared moving in the atmosphere, all manner of bright colours, like unto a goodly rainbow in the heavens, or a shower of all the delicatest flowers upon the earth, and presently forms could be distinctly traced amongst them ; and as they approached the banks of the river, it was seen that they were

crowds of tiny beings, of shape as beautiful as ever the eye looked on ; garmented very daintily in what seemed to be blossoms of divers kinds and colours. Their complexions were marvellous fair ; their hair of a bright golden hue, curling very prettily, decorated with exceeding small wreaths, or, mayhap, a dainty sweet flower worn as a helmet : and they floated on the air with infinite ease in every possible position ; some plunging head downwards, and others, as it were, reclining backwards, looking to observe who came after them. On they came, as countless as the stars ; and in the centre was one, round whom the rest were thronging with a wonderful shew of love and reverence ; and she reclined in a car, carved of pearl, that seemed to be as light as a gossamer, was shaped like a shell, and drawn by two bright winged butterflies. Her face was as lovely as the morning light, and on her brows she wore a coronal of jasmine studded with fresh dew drops. A scarf of rose colour of a singular fine fabric, the material whereof had doubtless been stolen from the silk worm's web, was tied from the shoulder to the hip, where it was fastened in a bow over a close vest of a sapphire hue, richly ornamented with gold leaves ; and the rest of her apparelling was of the like pretty fantasy. Scarcely had this exquisite fair creature and her companions alighted on the enamelled banks of the river, and the voices had become hushed into an indistinct

murmur of pleasure at finding of themselves at their journey's end, when the air was again filled with the same wondrous harmonies and delicate words, that had there been created so recently; but the voices now were of a deeper tone.

Presently there appeared hovering about, a vast crowd of similar little beings as those that had a moment since alighted on the ground, only these were of a more masculine aspect, and garmented in hose and doublet, fitting tight to the body, of divers delicate colours, wearing famous pretty feathers in their caps, mayhap filched from the small birds; and some had quivers of arrows at their backs. Some wore a smart rapier of at least the length of a tailor's needle; and many carried spears of a marvellous fine point and thinness. These were floating on the air in all manner of picturesque attitudes, save one who sat in a fair car of gold, drawn by a pair of gigantic dragon-flies, attended by a company who appeared to act as a guard of honour. He wore a crown on his head, and a rapier at his side, and a purple robe of fine velvet, richly embroidered with stars, over his vest. Perpetual youth sat smiling on his countenance, and his limbs were of so graceful a shape, my poor words have not the cunning to describe it. As this assembly descended to join the other, a chorus of mutual congratulation arose, whereof the burthen of the sylphs was, "Hail Oberon!" and that of the

others, "Hail Titania!"—shewing that those two were the king and queen of fairie—which seemed to be sung with such wonderful joy and so sweet a spirit, that it was exquisite to hear beyond all conceiving.

King Oberon having stepped from his car, advanced to that of his queen close by, and with a very excellent courtesy, did hand the fair Titania out, perchance to tread a measure on the verdant mead; whereupon their discourse ran thus:—

"Light of my life, and life of all my joy!"

rapturously exclaimed the fairy king.

"In whose fair eyes the fountains of my bliss—  
My soul drinks sweeter and more delicate draughts  
Than flowers or fruits provide; say with what aim—  
For well I know some hidden purpose lies  
Within the covert of thy fantasy,  
Have I been summoned with my company  
From the deep dingle in the emerald wood,  
Where—'mid the tangled roots and gnarled boughs  
Of reverential oaks and hoary pines—  
With our rude mirth we rouse the dappled deer  
Or chase the owlets to their dark retreats."

"And what wouldst give to know?"

asked Titania, with a pretty seriousness.

"What give, sweetheart?" replied he.

"How like a very woman art thou grown!  
Thou hast some pretty meaning in the act,  
Some quaint device—mayhap some harmless jest  
Whereby the rosy hollows of thy cheek  
Shall be arrayed with all thy fairest smiles,



To bear glad witness how man's wiser mind  
 Can by a woman's wit be set at nought.  
 And for the secret thou'lt a bargain make—  
 Which having ratified, the secret's told ;  
 And in its nothingness must lie the jest,  
 And its point thy triumph."

"Tush, my lord !"

cried his fair companion, half turning from him.

"Art thou so little curious as this ?

Nay, by the trembling beam that leaves the skies  
 To steal soft kisses from the yielding wave,  
 I'll hie me hence and tell thee not at all."

"In pity say not so !" said he.

"I'll say and do !"

answered the other with a famous shew of resolution.

"Seem'st thou not more inclined to learn the drift  
 Of why on such a night of all the year,  
 I bade thee hasten to this favoured spot."

"Then am I curious to such excess," observed her lord.

"As passeth all conceiving : I prythee say  
 What was thy purpose. Tell it straight,  
 For my impatience is so powerful  
 As will endure no hindrance."

"O' my word !" cried Titania.

"Thy nature grows impatient of a sudden.  
 Fie on thee, my Lord ! Dost mock me so !  
 With such conceits dost think a woman caught  
 Who for a curious humour hath been famed,  
 And therefore knoweth how it shews itself ?  
 Hadst *thou* a secret I would never rest  
 A minute, nay, a moment of the hour,  
 Till I became its mistress. I would watch  
 All fittest opportunities to ply  
 The searchingest questions ever spoke ;

And at thy rising and thy lying down,  
The hunt, the walk, the banquet or the dance ;  
In brief—in ev'ry time and ev'ry place,  
I'd importune thee with such earnestness—  
And in a way so lovingly withal,  
Thou couldst not hold it from me if thou wouldst ;  
Or shouldst thou still attempt to keep it hid,  
Then would I venture close to where it hides,  
And with sweet force dislodge it from thy lips."  
" Then thus such sweet enforcement I employ."

Thereupon his elfin majesty very gallantly did salute his lovely queen, the which she received as if in no way inclined to anger, as may be supposed; and then they, saying manifold loving pleasantries unto each other, walked to where there was a banquetting table, set out for them with all manner of tempting delicacies, and sat themselves down, each in a sort of throne: for the reader must be made aware, that whilst the king and queen of Fairie were conversing as hath been described, there were raised upon the green sward by their attendants, a royal canopy of crimson silk and gold, and a goodly display of most delectable cheer; and hundreds of the little people were running about putting the things in order—whilst groups of beautiful sylphs were receiving notable sweet courtesies from their elfin gallants; some reclining their graceful figures on the delicate grass, and others standing up as if preparing for the dance;—and in another place, there were seen a score or so of musicians a

tuning of their records, theorbos, citterns, harps, sackbuts, and the like choice instruments. Presently, the queen gave the sign for them to begin their revels, and then the music struck up a most ravishing minstrelsy; the dancers commenced treading a measure with such infinite grace as hath never been visible to mortal eyes, and the rest were disporting of themselves in all parts of the meadow, laughing, jesting, feasting, and making merry with such a prodigality of happiness as dull mortality hath no knowledge of. Some were a hunting of the field-mice into their holes, or driving the leaping frogs into the river, with a famous hallooing and admirable cheerful noise; others of the merry elves were amusing of themselves by jumping over the toadstools that grew thereabouts, and mayhap one, not being so good a leaper as his fellows, would jump clean into one of these dry fungous plants, to the near smothering of himself in its dust, and choking of his companions with laughter. Then some of the sylphs, who were not of the dancers, were engaged in making wreaths of the delicatest blossoms in season, either for those they affected of the other sex, or for their own wear. Others were putting together a true-love posie. Here and there might be seen a couple, apart from the rest, by the exquisite earnestness of their countenances, declaring themselves to be employed in such delectable manner as showed there

was no lack of affectionateness betwixt them ; and a company of others had got in the midst of them an elf of a most jocund spirit, known to divers by the several names of Puck, Robin Goodfellow, and Will-o'-the-Wisp, who, as was evident from their faces, with his droll jests and diverting tricks, kept them in a constant humour of laughing. Here would be one mischievous elf running after a sylph with a huge worm, which it was manifest she liked not the look of ; and there, another, pelting a companion with cowslips, who was making ready to fling at him with a like missile. Every where there was the appearance of the very absolutest free-heartedness ; not a grave face was to be seen—not a sigh was to be heard. In the meanwhile, Oberon and Titania resumed their discourse after the following fashion :—

“ Despite the rating I have had, sweet life !” exclaimed he,

“ Thy secret purpose still remains untold.”

“ Now art thou getting curious in good truth !”

she answered with a smile.

“ Yet 'twould methinks be fitting punishment  
To keep thee ignorant still, and hold thee so ;  
And now and then by deep mysterious hints,  
Ambiguous phrases, and quaint fashioned words,  
To fix thy patience on the tenter hooks ;  
And then to laugh at thy incuriousness.”

“ I prythee use me not so cruelly,” cried Oberon.

“ Dost feel a wish to learn this thing of me ?”

asked his fair queen earnestly.

"By thy most precious love I do!" he replied.

"And now, what wouldst thou give to know?"  
exclaimed she with great emphasis.

"I'll give thee aught  
That lieth in the compass of my power,"  
replied he, with as much earnestness in his looks as in his words.

"I'll bid the yellow goblins of the earth  
To pile thee heaps of treasure—from the deep  
I'll call the fairest mermaid of the wave  
To fish thee up the rarest pearl that lies  
Hid in its secret caves. Say but the word,  
I'll fetch thee breezes from the spicy south,  
Bearing within their overladen laps  
The aromatic breath and odours rare  
Of balmy blossoms and delicious gums—  
Or from the ever glowing orient  
Where the warm sky, like an enamoured maid,  
Of her too loving nature half ashamed,  
Looks on the earth with a perpetual blush,  
All manner of such choice and tempting cates  
As liberal nature there delights to shew—  
Long ere the circling hours their task have done—  
In bounteous banquet will I here array."

"All goodly gifts indeed!" observed the fairy queen.

"I'll hunt the air  
To rob its tenants of their courtliest plumes,  
And far and wide the forest chambers range  
To carry off their richest furniture;  
I'll"—

"Nay, I am content!"  
said she, interrupting of his speech.

"I'll not exhaust  
So prodigal a spirit. Now attend,

And if thy curiousness be truly great,  
Thy ears must needs be ravenously intent  
Upon devouring up my ev'ry word."

This led to the appearance of increased curiousness on the part of her lord, which Titania dallied with so artfully, that Oberon broke out into exceeding impatience, whereupon she exclaimed as if in huge astonishment :—

"Forsooth, and is it so ! Alack, my lord,  
I marvel at a sight so new and strange !  
Man *can* be curious then ? How wonderful !  
It hath been said that womankind alone  
Were moved by curiousness, whilst man too proud,  
Too great,—too good to have such poor defects,  
Lived in incurious ease his nobler life.  
Why, what a change is here ! Well, I have done—  
My object gained, I'll now my thoughts unfold."

"Ah, prythee do !" said Oberon. Then continued she—

"Thou know'st with what great love  
I do regard the children of this isle—  
How long and deeply I have longed to find  
Some gentle nature fed by glorious thoughts,  
In whose delighting spirit I could breathe  
The love of all things excellent and true,  
That he might be found worthy of our care  
Whilst we in him took profitable heed.  
Thou knowest with what earnestness of heart  
I've sought for one so lovingly disposed,  
And found him not—thou knowest too  
Of all the sweetest spots in this fair land,  
This town of merry Stratford, and the stream  
That glides in graceful beauty at its side,  
I most affect—for honest simple souls

There crowd the chimney nook, and listen long  
 With firm belief and pleasure undisguised,  
 To frequent tales of fairy worthiness,  
 Till bedtime come ; and then hie they to bed  
 And dream of music, flowers, and lovely shapes,  
 And innocent revelry and decent mirth,  
 'Till Chanticleer's shrill clarion wake them up  
 In cheerful labour to wear out the day."

"Ay!" exclaimed her lord, smiling.

"And if Puck but chance to have been there,  
 Doubt not this trust of theirs in our good help  
 Make sport for him and some mischance for them.  
 Mayhap some starveling burgess through the night  
 In dreams shall feast on princely delicacies,  
 And wake without a crust to break his fast ;  
 Or that some pedlar's wife both poor and proud,  
 For hours shall play the lady bountiful,  
 Till from the rushes she is forced to rise  
 To mend the patch-work of her husband's slops."

"Talk not to me of Puck, the graceless elf!" cried Titania.

"He shall be whipped with nettles if he dare  
 Intrude his tricksy spirit 'neath their roofs ;  
 But hear me out. There dwells in yonder town  
 A modest wife with all kind feelings blessed,  
 Rich in a woman's riches—virtuous thoughts ;  
 Gentle and generous, simple, fond, and true,  
 Careful of house, and of a famous thrift ;  
 And she a mother is about to be.  
 This child unborn I know will prove a boy,  
 Under mine own eyes shall this boy be reared,  
 I will his disposition mould and shape  
 And make his nature shew the fairest signs  
 That ever blessed a mortal. Of his mind  
 I'll form a storehouse of the noblest thoughts—  
 The lore of Nature's many-leaved works

He there shall garner liberally and well,  
 Until it holds the library complete ;  
 And in his heart a treasury I'll rear  
 Of sweet affections, honourable desires,  
 Fond aspirations, feelings high and proud,  
 And sympathies for all things beautiful ;  
 Then by the hand this gentle boy I'll lead  
 Into the lovely places of the earth,  
 And shew him all the delicatest sights—  
 The field, the forest, valley, stream, and hill,  
 The exquisite sweet blossoms newly blown,  
 And the fair sky that spans and shines o'er all ;  
 The whilst within his ravished ears shall glide  
 An everlasting concert of delight  
 From the soft breeze, the rustling trees, the wave  
 That makes its path in music—from the herd,  
 The flock, the hive, and all the feathered quires  
 That thrill the air with melodies divine ;  
 Unto the merry cricket's silvery chirp,  
 Or shrill sweet pipe of cheerful grasshopper."

"Methinks that boy must lead a pleasant life,"

observed her lord.

"He shall find pleasure seek it where he will," she replied.

"For in his eyes shall dwell a power to see,  
 And in his breast an impulse to enjoy  
 The pleasantest things that nature doth possess :  
 And every pleasure shall a lesson bring,  
 And every lesson be with pleasure learned.  
 The loving hopes that grace humanity—  
 The fears, the cares, the passions, and the joys,  
 That wrestle with its spirit—the deep throes  
 Ambition dies with, and the gnashing pain  
 With which revenge is born—the mighty stils  
 Whereon pride mounts its glaring littleness—  
 The mean resorts where cunning loves to hide—



The selfish wants that avarice keeps and kills,  
And the great gluttony that eats itself,  
Shall in his vision prominently live.  
But with the knowledge of the human world  
To him shall come a learning more refined,  
Drawn from a brighter, better, wiser source.  
The gems that stud the canopy of night  
When Time proclaims the burial of the day,  
And those of daintier sort, though lowlier born,  
That give the air its life, and earth its grace,  
Shall fill his soul with meanings quaint and new—  
From the deep shadows of the reverend woods,  
And noon-tide sunshine in its golden streams,  
He shall bring marvels : in the quiet light  
Of the fair moon and her fair company,  
A throng of starry thoughts that never set—  
Under the shelving banks of the tall hedge,  
And by the margin of the pebbly brook,  
And 'mid the mosses of the abbey wall,  
And round about the antiquated trunks  
Of forest giants bare of leaf and branch,  
He shall discover sage authorities  
Oft to be quoted at a future day.  
And wheresoe'er he ventureth himself,  
Whether along the open fields he strays  
When blooming beauty woos him as he walks,  
Or through the tangled copse he makes a path,  
Where songs of welcome burst from every tree,  
Or by the Avon's winding bed he roams,  
That offers to his eyes the glittering shower  
With which this yielding Danaë is won,  
A thousand servitors shall round him throng  
With loving guidance keeping him from harm ;  
Sport in the beam that seeks to dim his gaze,  
Bend the low twig and catch the falling branch  
That bars his way or topples on his head ;

And where his look, in marvellous wonder falls,  
Hold up the fairest blossoms to its view,  
And shew him where earth's choicest sights lie hid."

"But for what purport are these things to be?"

asked Oberon.

"That with a nature so divinely reared,"

replied his admirable companion.

"And with a knowledge so profoundly gained,  
He to the people of this favoured isle  
Shall present pleasure bounteously afford,  
And be a glory in all after times."

"A purport worthy of the Fairy Queen!"

exclaimed her lord.

"And I, that boy from manhood's sterner days,  
Will take in charge, that no ungracious deeds  
May mar the beauty of his after-life.  
But struggles must he have, and griefs, and pains,  
And disappointments terrible to bear;  
And then prosperity and friends and fame,  
And honours that true greatness loves to see,  
Shall try the temper of his metal well,  
And prove to all his quality and worth."

Now there was seen amongst them such abundance of pleasant pastime, as was quite a marvel to behold, in the which the tricky Will-o'-the-Wisp, or Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, as he was variously called, did appear to enjoy himself to the very bent of his humour. In the mean while, Titania and Oberon, having sufficiently discoursed of their intentions regarding the boy mentioned by them, moved from the banquet, and were soon pleasantly

engaged treading of a measure to the delicatest music ever known. All of a sudden as they were disporting of themselves, every one of them very merrily, there came one hastening from the other end of the meadow, crying out something, the which as soon as it was heard, banquet, canopy, dancers, musicians, and all the fairy world disappeared in the twinkling of an eye; and of that gallant company no vestige now remained. The blades of the young grass, unharmed by the light footfalls of the tiny dancers, bent to the midnight wind. The frogs came peeping from the rushes, and the timid water-rat ventured to put her head out of the covered hole beneath the river's bank, wherein she had made her home.

"It be woundy cold o' nights, still dame, for all it be getting so nigh unto the flowery month of May," exclaimed an awkward varlet, looking to be something betwixt man and boy, and dressed in a humble suit of russet, famously worn and soiled, that fitted him not at all, as, carrying of a huge lanthorn with outstretched arm before him, he seemed to be guiding of a short stout woman, well wrapped up in a serviceable cloak and muffler, who bent her steps through the field towards the neighbouring town.

"Ay, it be cold enough, out of all doubt," replied his companion, in a quick thick voice, half swallowed in her muffler, as she endeavoured to

keep as near as possible to his heels. "Yet do I remember me a colder night than this, two year ago this very day."

"Odd zooks! was it so indeed?" asked the other in a tone of monstrous wondering.

"Ay, that was it, Humphrey," replied the woman with impressive earnestness. "That night I had laid me down to rest my weary bones, and nigh unto midnight I had got me into the comfortablest slumber, weary body ever had, when there came at the gate so huge a noise, I had like to have been frightened out of my sleep and my wits too. I dressed me in a presently, wondering who could be a sending at that time, not expecting to hear from Mistress Hathaway, for a month to come, nor from Dame Hart, for a full week; when, looking out from the lattice I spied a horseman, in a cloak that swept down close upon his horse's heels, who, in a terrible high voice, bade me come quick, for life and death depended on my speed. Thereupon, as may be supposed of me, I made all convenient haste in my apparelling,—for thou knowest, Humphrey, I like to keep none waiting."

"O my life, Gammer Lambswool," exclaimed the other drily, "kept you not me an hour by the clock, ere I got sight of you, I know not what waiting means."

"Nay, nay—thou couldst not have been at the

gate so long as that," replied the old woman; "for ere thou hadst well knocked twice, I called to thee from the lattice."

"So God me save," cried out Humphrey, with wonderful emphasis, "I knocked some score of times—to say nought of the monstrous bawling I kept up, loud enough to wake the seven sleepers; and I doubt not at all, master will give me a taste of the cudgel for having tarried so long."

"He shall do thee no such unkind office, be assured," said Gammer Lambswool, "for I will take care to bear thee blameless in the matter. But to return to what I was a saying," added she, too glad at having a listener to let him off without the whole story. "On coming to the gate, the stranger was for having me mount upon a pillion behind him, which I liked not at first; but upon his pressing the emergency of the case, and placing a gold piece in my hand, I made no more to do—for I like not appearing over scrupulous in matters of jeopardy, the more especially when an honest wage is to be gained by it. I had scarce got my seat when the stranger said he must needs blind-fold me, the which I liked less than the other; but upon his assuring me I should suffer no harm, and placing another gold piece in my hand, I suffered it to be done, for thinks I, mayhap, the occasion requireth secrecy; and I oft had a huge suspicion there was no necessity for me to seem to know more than

those who required my aid, would allow; if so be they paid me well for holding of my curiousness."

"Here be a villainous thick cloud about to cover up the moon, and be hanged to it!" exclaimed her companion in a tone of vexation, as, with a face waxing marvellously fearful, he watched the approach of a broad black cloud spreading over the sky. "Make more speed I pray you, good Gammer, else shall we be left in the dark before we have got out of this field, which hath the horriddest reputation of any place in these parts; and I like not passing through it at this late hour, I promise you."

"In honest truth it be not in good repute," observed the old woman, quickening her pace somewhat. "Unnatural strange sights have been seen here, and it be well known that they by whom they have been looked on, have never been themselves since. But to my story. Hardly had he blindfolded me, when he spurred his horse to so monstrous a pace, that it seemed more like unto flying than riding; and, not having been used to such, perchance I should soon have been jolted from my seat, had not I held my companion round the girdle as firm as a vice. Now began I to repent of my too great willingness to venture on this errand. I was going I knew not where, with I knew not whom, to do I knew not what; but when

THE STORY OF THE GREAT RACE

"I have been thinking of you ever since I met  
you at the great race. I have been thinking of  
you ever since I met you at the great race. I have  
been thinking of you ever since I met you at the  
great race. I have been thinking of you ever since  
I met you at the great race. I have been thinking  
of you ever since I met you at the great race."

"I have been thinking of you ever since I met  
you at the great race. I have been thinking of  
you ever since I met you at the great race. I have  
been thinking of you ever since I met you at the  
great race. I have been thinking of you ever since  
I met you at the great race. I have been thinking  
of you ever since I met you at the great race."

"I have been thinking of you ever since I met  
you at the great race. I have been thinking of  
you ever since I met you at the great race. I have  
been thinking of you ever since I met you at the  
great race. I have been thinking of you ever since  
I met you at the great race. I have been thinking  
of you ever since I met you at the great race."

"I have been thinking of you ever since I met  
you at the great race. I have been thinking of  
you ever since I met you at the great race. I have  
been thinking of you ever since I met you at the  
great race. I have been thinking of you ever since  
I met you at the great race. I have been thinking  
of you ever since I met you at the great race."

half through this terrible field yet;" cried Humphrey, evidently more attentive to the look of the sky than the speech of his companion.

"Marry, 'tis so sure enough!" exclaimed the old dame, taking a hasty glance at the moon. "Well, there found I a dainty young creature assuredly in as doleful a strait as poor lady ever was; and I came in the very nick of time, to do her such desirable service as she required of me. I sought to give her what comfort I could, but I was stopped by the voice of him who had brought me, angrily bidding me hold my prate, and speed my office; and then broke he out into such bitter invectives against the poor lady, as were dreadful to hear, to the which she replied never a word, for indeed she could not, she was in such severe travail. At last, to my great joy, the lady became a mother; but scarce had I took the babe in my arms, when my gentleman, who had been all this time striding across the room, seemingly in a horrible bad humour, hearing the child cry, darted towards me, snatched it rudely away, and hurried out of the room with it. I felt at that moment as if 'twould be an easy matter to knock me down with a feather. I could have no doubt there was a most cruel mischief a-doing, and my blood run cold within me, at the thought of it."

"There! the moon hath gone clean out of sight!" exclaimed Humphrey, as if in utter despair.



"Alack, what an unchristian place for an honest poor body to be in at this late hour."

"Well, we must e'en get on as well as we can, and the lanthorn will help us to make sure we go not astray," observed the other, consolingly.

"What to do I knew not," continued she. "The poor mother looked to be scarce alive, that was pitiful enough to see, let her fault have been what it might; but taking away the life of an innocent babe that had scarce began to breathe, could not be ought else than a very devilish and unnatural murder."

"Nay, talk not of murder I pray you, good Gammer!" cried her companion very movingly; "I cannot see the length of my arm, and I know not what monstrous fearful things may be in the darkness, ready to pounce out upon us."

"Nothing unnatural can hurt you if you be not evil inclined, let them here lie ever so thick," observed the old dame; but this seemed not to add much to the other's small stock of courage, for he continued to walk along, looking suspiciously about him in as perfect a fear as ever was, whilst Gammer Lambswool strove to keep as close at his heels as she could.

"Ere I could recover myself from the strange fright, what had been that moment done, had put me in, he returned, and without the child," added

she, with much emphasis. "Whereupon I was so confounded and terrified at the sight of him, that I remember not what further took place, till I found myself at mine own door with a full purse in my hand; but less glad at the sight of it than I was to be quit of the villain's company."

"Mercy, Gammer, what be that?" cried Humphrey, in a monstrous fearful voice, as he lifted up his lanthorn, evidently a trembling from head to foot, and seemed to be gazing at something in the distance.

"Where, I pray you!" inquired the other, eagerly, as she strove to raise herself on her toes for to peep over his shoulder.

"It moves!" whispered her companion, drawing his breath hard.

"Heaven save us from all harm!" muttered the old woman, beginning to partake of the other's alarm, though she knew not as yet what it was caused by.

"By St. Nicholas, it be making towards us!" added he, as plainly as his fright would allow, and the next moment the lanthorn dropped from his trembling hands, and he fell on his knees, saying of his prayers, with his teeth a chattering as if he was taken with an ague. Gammer Lambswool, being in the dark—for their light had been extinguished by the fall—and hearing something approaching, was about to take to her prayers also, when she

was startled by a quick succession of blows, that seemed to fall upon her companion with a force that quickly put all conceit of a ghost out of her head.

“Why, thou idling varlet!” exclaimed a voice close besider her. “Wert not strictly told not to tarry a moment, and thou hast been gone nigh these two hours past—a murrain on thee.”

“Oh, master!” bawled Humphrey, most lustily, writhing under the punishment he was receiving. “Hurt me no more, I pray you. Mercy, good master! In honest truth I tarried no more than I could help.”

“Indeed, Master Shakspeare, he is not to blame, for I was hindered from coming,” cried the old woman. “But tell me, I beseech you, how fareth your sweet wife?”

“Badly, as she needs must, when she hath been crying out for you so long,” answered he, as if somewhat out of humour.”

“Well, dear heart, lead you the way, I will haste to her without a moment’s more delaying,” said the Gammer, in a sort of coaxing voice; upon which Humphrey, picking up his lanthorn, and quite forgetting his fear in the cudgelling he had lately had, although, in honest truth, he had been scarce hurt at all,—seeing his master and the midwife moving off as fast as they could—kept close to their heels till they reached John Shakspeare’s dwelling in Henley Street.

## CHAPTER II.

*At first* THE INFANT.

SHAKSPEARE.

*Porter.* On my Christian conscience, this one christening will beget a thousand ; here will be father, godfather, and all together.

*Man.* The spoons will be the bigger, sir.

IBID.

He ruleth all the roast  
With bragging and with boast,  
Borne up on every side  
With pomp and with pride.

JOHN SKELTON.

No quarrelling, for God's sake ! Truly if you do, I shall set a knave between ye.

THOMAS HEYWOOD. (*A Woman killed with kindness.*)

Now was there an admirable jovial company assembled at the dwelling of Dame Shakspeare, to do honour to the christening of her child, and among them were many of the worthy burgesses of Stratford ; for be it understood, John Shakspeare was known to be a thriving man, and such are sure to have no lack of acquaintances ; and his excellent partner having come of a family of some repute in those parts, being no other than the heiress of Arden, was much looked up to ; and, as she appeared unto all, of an honest kind heart and admirable sweet nature, she possessed every one's good word. Of which the consequence was, the

house could scarce contain the company the occasion had assembled. Some stood about the porch jesting and making merry; others were in the garden, especially of the younger sort, amusing themselves with pleasant talk one with another. One or two decent motherly dames were in the kitchen bustling to and fro, looking to the dinner, of which a huge fire covered with pots and kettles, and having a famous large joint at the spit, a little ragged urchin kept turning—being well minded of all not to let it burn—shewed some preparation—the whilst a stout wench with famous red cheeks and elbows, evidently in her best finery, along with Humphrey, in his Sunday jerkin, kept hurrying in and out, laden with knives, napery, drinking vessels, trenchers, and other needful things at a feasting.

In the best chamber of the whole house which looked to be newly strewed with fresh rushes, and garnished here and there with such flowers as were in season, some in china bowls, and some in parcel-gilt goblets, there was a large recess, made by that end of the room abutting out into the street, wherein were most of the principal personages of the company. First, for in respect of his calling, I would give him precedency of the others, there sat Sir Nathaniel the curate, easily to be known by his portly person, his merry eye, his loud laugh, and his free speech. It was bruited abroad that he loved good living better than became a churchman,

and his maple face and famous round belly, did confirm such tales wonderfully. In apparel he was slovenly, and not over clean in his linen; but being of a ready wit and of a cheerful humour, he went on from day to day feasting wherever there was any store of victual, a welcome if not an honoured guest. Beside him was one Stripes the schoolmaster, and, as folks said, a notable conjuror, who had a very lean look with him, and wore such garments as seemed to be clean past all recovery of tailoring, they were so threadbare. By what was going on, it appeared as if he was content to be the butt of the other, for he took in good part all the jests the curate aimed at his shrunk shanks, his lanthorn jaws, his darned hose, and his old fashioned doublet, and moreover assented to what the other said, with a readiness that savoured much of servility. Nearer this waysat a substantial looking yeoman, by name Richard Hathaway, clad in honest homespun, in deep discourse with a neighbouring wealthy sheep farmer, concerning the market price of wool, the state of the crops, and the like matters. A knot of burgesses were standing round two aldermen of the town, who were debating very stoutly upon business connected with the corporation; and the parish-clerk, a little dumpy man, with monstrous thick legs, was leaning half out of the casement, in earnest talk with some one in the street below.

At the further end of the chamber were all the

women congregated, apparelled in their very best, and talking as though none had a mind to listen. The rich farmer's wife, sitting very stately in a robe of fine scarlet, with a white hood, a gay purse, and a bunch of keys at her side, hanging from a silken belt of silver tissue; whilst her waist was bound with a sash of grass-green silk richly embroidered, no lack of jewels about her, and on each finger two rings at least, divided the admiration of her companions with the aldermen's wives in watchet-coloured tunics and fringed kirtles, with golden coifs and other costly toys, wherewith they had attired themselves. In the midst of them sat Dame Shakspeare, modestly and matronly clad, and without doubt, as semely a woman as any there, looking contented and happy, and giving very earnest thanks to her good friends and guests as they made up to her with some pretty gift or another—mayhap, a set of apostle spoons, or a standing cup of silver, or a gilt bowl, for the boy, who, with the chrisom-cloth about him in token of his recent baptism, lay in the arms of his nurse—a rosy faced dame, who stood beside her mistress commending of the babe to all comers above all babes that ever lived. And lastly, by the door, giving a hearty welcome to all who entered, dressed in an excellent suit of Lincoln green, and having as cheerful a face as man ever wore, stood worthy John Shakspeare, the giver of the feast.

"Come in, neighbours ! I pray you, come in !" exclaimed he, as some were entering. "I am heartily glad to see you, and my good dame be as ready to give you a welcome I'll be bound for't. Well met Thomas Hart ! Robert Bruce I commend me to your good will. Worthy Hamnet Sadler I am much beholden to you for this visit. Ha, Oliver Dumps !" cried he, as his eyes lighted on a melancholy looking little man, in a new leather jerkin and black karsie hose. "Though most men hugely mislike visits of the constable, I greet you well."

"God requite you, neighbour," answered the man, not altering a whit the solemnness of his aspect.

"Methinks, we are all indifferently honest," continued his host. "Yet are we well inclined you should exercise your office amongst us with as little hindrance as may be."

"Marry, 'tis a villainous world !" exclaimed the constable. "But if any dishonesty hath been done, point me out the knave, that I may take him up before his worship."

"Nay, by your leave, not so," replied the other. "If you are for taking up, we are only willing you should take up the dinner : but with such an offender we doubt not being able to play the high bailiff as well as any in the county, and would on the instant commit him to safe custody, in our own keeping." Thereupon there was a laugh of those around ; for when the host taketh upon himself to



jest, even if his wit be not of the brightest, the guests must lack good manners sadly, if their mirth break not out at it without stinting.

"See you, John a Combe?" enquired the buxom wife of one of the aldermen to the other, as they now stood somewhat apart from the rest, observing the scene I have endeavoured to describe.

"Ay, yonder is he, Mistress Alderman Malmsey," replied the other, pointing to one who had just entered, and seemed by his apparel to be somewhat of a gallant, for he was very daintily dressed in a new puce-coloured doublet, with scarlet hose, buff shoes, and fine rosettes to them: a well starched ruff below his beard, and a handsome rapier at his girdle.

"By our Lady, Mistress Alderman Dowlas, he beareth himself bravely," exclaimed the first.

"I'faith, methinks he is as pretty a man as any of his inches," added the other.

"And then to note how civilly he behaveth himself," continued Dame Malmsey. "He ever speaketh of us women in such delicate respectful terms as would do a woman's heart good to hear; and if any so much as insinuate ought to our prejudice, it moveth him so, he will be ready to fight the biggest man of them all."

"And yet I marvel he should still remain a bachelor," observed Dame Dowlas. "He cannot be less than a good manly age, for as Master Alder-

man, my husband, hath told me, it was twenty-five years come Whitsuntide, since old John a Combe bought his wedding suit of his father; and that he is well accommodated for a wife there can be no question, seeing that he hath ever a fair sum of money in his purse at a friend's need, and old John a Combe hath the reputation of well filled coffers."

"Perchance the old man is not willing his son should marry," said her companion. "Or, mayhap, thinks it fit he should wed with none but the chiefest families, for he hath taken infinite pains, and spared not the cost, he should have as good schooling as any in the land; whereof the consequence is, you shall find young John a Combe one of the properest gentlemen to be met with in all Warwickshire."

"Certes, he seemeth not to affect one more than another," exclaimed Dame Malmsey. "But I would wager my best kirtle, there is never a maid for five miles round Stratford, who would not give her ears to have him for a husband."

"In all sincerity I say it, I wish he may find a wife worthy of him," said the other, to which her companion added a like sincere wish. In the meanwhile, the object of their friendly commendations passed across the chamber, very courteously returning the courtesies of those he met,—and few were there that did not hasten to greet him, as soon as

... might sight of him at his entrance, which  
 ... in what estimation he was. These as quickly  
 ... could be parted from, and made up to  
 ... who with a face radiant with  
 ... gave him her hand at his ap-

... I have come so  
 ... a very soft gentlemanlike  
 ... against my will, else  
 ...

... about it," re-  
 ... kindness.  
 ... Master  
 ... "what you will."

... "adding some-  
 ... "added  
 ... "the pretty  
 ... "For never  
 ... "circumstances."

... "the world  
 ... "toward

... "with  
 ... "the  
 ... "I was  
 ... "the

... him  
 I know not  
 ... note how

fall

silk ever was of such marvellous fineness—here are cheeks that bees would cluster at taking them to be such delicate rarities as they have had no experience of—but the eyes. I pray your worship, look at these eyes ! What pretty twinklers they be ! So mild, so soft, so loving, and so roguish withal ! 'Ifaith, eyes of so rare a sort surely no child ever had ; and as for this dainty little mouth—if there shall be found any cherry so tempting to look upon, I am no true woman."

" O my life, he is wonderfully pretty !" cried John a Combe, gazing with an admiring eye upon its many attractions.

" Dost think so, really?" asked the happy mother.

" But then, it hath such strange, wise, notable ways with it as exceed all my cunning to describe," continued the nurse, jumping her charge up and down abit as nurses do. " And for a curious nature, his exceedeth all comprehension. There shall nothing pass in his presence unnoticed of him ; and if anything new come within his reach, doubt not he will have hold of it in a presently ; nay, his curiousness is of so extreme a sort, that if he but get sight of a thing, he will allow of no peace till he have it in his hand, and thereby gain some knowledge what stuff it be made of."

" Methinks, nurse, there is much sign of after wisdom in being so early a learner," observed John a Combe.

“ Ay, an it please your worship, that is there I’ll warrant you,” replied she. “ Then as for his temper, he is so sweetly disposed, none can help loving him. He is none of your cross-grained, restless, ill-behaved little brats that be ever a squalling and bawling from morning till night, disturbing of every one—not he by my halidom ! for he is so peacable, you might live in the house and not know a babe was in it. He goeth to sleep just when it is proper for him, and wakes himself up only at such times as may be most convenient for him to be looked to. In short, I will be bound for’t, his like is not to be found in this world ; and if he come not to be a bishop, or at least a justice o’ the peace, I shall be hugely mistaken in him.”

“ O my word, nurse, you have mighty hopes of him,” exclaimed Dame Shakspeare, gazing fondly, and somewhat proudly, on the object of so much eulogy, as it lay dandling in the arms of her attendant. “ In good truth, I cannot expect for the boy any such famous fortune, and should be well satisfied, could I be assured he would live to play the part of an honest man, and die in the estimation of his fellows.”

“ If such be your desire, believe me the assurance is easily come at,” remarked John a Combe, courteously ; “ for it is manifest from what nurse hath said of him, that he possesses his mother’s excellent rare virtues, and with such commendable gifts

he cannot fail to realize all honourable expectations."

"I am proud of your good opinion, worthy Master Combe," answered she, with the unaffectedness of a truly modest woman. "It shall at least keep me at my powerfulest endeavours to deserve it better."

"As some small token of my regard, I beseech you, accept of me this poor trifle for your sweet son," said he, as he produced a very daintily wrought silver cup and cover.

"Beshrew my heart, but that is as pretty a present for a babe as I have seen this many a day," exclaimed the nurse; and then addressing the infant, as she let him rise and fall in her arms, cried out, "Hoity toity, my young master! thou hast a goodly store of friends methinks! But thou deservest it every bit, thou dost, thou pretty rogue!" And then she fell to tickling of him with one hand upon his chest, whilst she held him by the other, till the babe laughed after so delicate a fashion as was exquisite to see.

"I feel too much beholden to you, worthy Master Combe, to say aught of the matter," said the delighted mother.

"And here, nurse," he added, taking out of his purse a piece of silver, which he placed in her hands; "is some small token you should bestow your best attentions on this my young friend here."

"That will I, your worship, depend on't, and a million of thanks for your worship's largess," exclaimed the other, dropping a curtsey, as she accepted the coin. "Well, commend me to Master Combe, for a true gentleman!" continued she, as soon as he had retired to another part of the chamber.

"He is ever so," answered her mistress. "He giveth signs of a most liberal heart, and is at all times a ready mean for the doing of any good. Perchance one might travel many miles, and not meet with so good a neighbour, so true a friend, or so worthy a Christian."

"Now, neighbours! now, friends! an it please you in to dinner," cried John Shakspeare; on the instant, all were in preparation to obey the welcome summons, and John a Combe hurrying back to Dame Shakspeare, gallantly led the way with her, followed by the rest of the company, till he had placed her in her proper seat. After Sir Nathaniel had said grace, the company sat down to a dinner that would have gladdened any but to have beheld; for there was brought upon the table a famous store of all things in season, with plenty of excellent liquor, both ale and cider; and all set to with good appetites, and with an evident determination to enjoy the cheer that had been provided for them. Of these, none so distinguished himself as did the curate and the schoolmaster. Stripes

sat nearly bolt upright in his chair, as serious as a judge and as ravenous as a wolf; yet there was not so glaring an impudency in his proceedings as was in the other, for he was not importunate—he waited to be asked—eat what was given him—was ready again; and with small pressing, continued at it till long after all else had done.

The host and hostess seemed ever anxious that each person should have what he liked, and plenty of it, and kept Maud the girl, and Humphrey the boy, at their vigilance, supplying of what was needed, whilst John a Combe busied himself in pressing those nighest him to make good cheer, and looked as if he cared not what he had himself as long as the rest fared well. Of a surety every one appeared to enjoy himself to his heart's content: nor were the women altogether unmindful of the bountiful hospitality that had garnished the board; for they eat and praised, and smiled in such a sort as shewed how well they were pleased with their entertainment.

At last the meal was over, the dishes removed, and in their stead the tables were covered with a plentiful variety of cakes, such fruit as could be got, Marchpane, apples and comfits, stewed prunes and dishes of other preserves, syllabubs for the younger folks made of new milk and verjuice, and wine for the elders of two or three several kinds; besides which, John Shakspeare was brewing a goodly



bowl of sack with sugar in it, for such as affected such delicate drink, of whom the two aldermen were most conspicuous, swearing there was no such liquor in the world, whilst his excellent sweet wife opposite was preparing a jug of spiced ale, such liquor being desired, above all others, by such of her guests as were farmers or yeomen; ever and anon saying something to the nurse, who was standing behind her chair with the babe in her arms; or acknowledging, with some few gracious words, the courtesies of John a Combe, who sat nigh her, and by his own readiness took heed that she should have every thing she needed ready at her hand. The jingling of glasses, and the like noises, caused by the moving of bottles, and other drinking vessels, having in some degree subsided, and all having before them what they most desired, it was observed that John a Combe stood up with his glass filled in his hand; and, with some ado, the rude prating of Sir Nathaniel being stopped, he was heard to speak after this fashion:—

“ My worthy good neighbours and friends ! There is a custom, now of old standing in this our very dear country, which methinks should be held in good esteem of all true English hearts : to wit, the drinking of healths, which, I take it, is a great encourager of honest love ; and keepeth true friendship in excellent remembrance among all men. Now it may be known unto you that this same

estimable custom is in most request amongst those of old acquaintance. Therefore I beseech you pardon me, if on this occasion I require of you to follow the custom with some alteration. There is no old familiar friend I would now ask your remembrance of; but one whose very name hath been unknown to you till this day. I cannot point out to you what noticeable virtues he hath shewn, worthy of your commendation; for as yet I have been so little in his company, he hath not had time to shew his goodness to me; but knowing his father's extreme honesty of soul, and his mother's manifold excellences of nature, I am assured he cannot fail to have in him such bountiful gifts, as in good time must bring to him all good men's affections. Neighbours! I pray you, with full cups, join with me very heartily in drinking—health to our young friend William Shakspeare, a long life and a prosperous!”

Methinks there should be no need to assure the reader that the desire of John a Combe was followed on the instant with the sincere good will of all present.

“Well done, John a Combe!” shouted Sir Nathaniel; “O’ my life, a truly excellent proper speech: and very scholarly spoken. What sayest Ticklebreech?” cried he familiarly to the school-master, who sat over against him. “Is not the speech a sound speech, ay, and a notable speech, ay, and a speech of marvellous discretion?”

“An’ it please your reverence,” replied Stripes, looking all the whilst as solemn as if it was a matter of life or death with him; “touching the speech that hath lately had utterance amongst us, I will make so bold as to say, that a properer speech shall not be found, even should you seek for it in the choicest of Demosthenes his Philippics, or of Cicero his Orations. It is a speech that hath in it these several excellences—excellence of matter—excellence of rhetoric—and excellence of—”

“It may be known of all here I am no scholar, like unto our good friend and neighbour Master Combe,” observed John Shakspeare, with his honest cheerful face all of a glow, and to the complete cutting short of the schoolmaster in what threatened to be an exceeding prosy discourse. “Yet had I what I lack the most, I doubt it would do me such good office as sufficiently to assure him of the full great love I bear him in my heart for the friendliness he hath shewn to me and mine on this and other occasions. Fain would I dilate concerning of what numberless famous proofs he hath exhibited of the generousness of his humour, but that I know none of you stand in any ignorance of them. From his earliest life he hath been given to all manner of truly estimable virtues; and now his riper manhood, in its thorough honesty and free-heartedness, declareth what proper effect hath come of the exceeding virtuousness of his youth. I feel proud

that Stratford can boast of such a one ; and I pray you, pardon me, when I add, my pride is none the less at finding that such a one should hold me in his commendation ; for, as I take it, to be well spoken of is ever to be desired ; but the praise of the praiseworthy is a thing beyond all price. In testimony that your opinion accordeth with mine own, I beseech you, neighbours, join with me in drinking to the health of our worthy townsman, John a Combe, desiring that he may long continue to live amongst us, in the same pride and honour as he doth at this present."

" Marry, but this looketh to be the properest speech of the two !" exclaimed Sir Nathaniel, as all prepared themselves—and with evidence of great good will—to do as their host would have them ; " what sayest, Pedagogus ? "

" Indeed, and as your reverence out of your singular wisdom hath observed," said the schoolmaster, refraining awhile from the pippin he was a moment since intent upon adding to the great mass of victual that had gone before it. " It be out of all comparison the properest speech. In short, it shall be found, on the very searchingest examination, of so proper a sort, that its fellow shall not be met with, seek where you will."

Much more of the same poor stuff he might have added, had not the voice of John a Combe sent him, nothing loath, to the munching of his pippin ;

for he was of that well-disposedness, he would hold his prate when his betters were talking; but among poorer folk he would say out his say, were it a mile to the end; and heed none, should they talk ever so. Master Combe, thereupon, quickly disclaimed any title to praise for whatever he had done; asserting that it was what every man should do, regardless of all else but the good that came of it. This brought others to speak, especially the aldermen and burgesses of his particular acquaintance, who in homely fashion gave their evidence of his worthiness. In fact, every one appeared anxious to say in what great estimation he was held of them—only with one solitary exception. Of the company was one Master Buzzard, a gentleman of those parts, who, for all he was of better estate than any there, was an ignorant vain person, living in great dissoluteness, with such companions as the priest and the schoolmaster, and other roysterers; and cared for nothing so much as hawking, and spending his time in riotous ill-living among such as were ready to fall into his humour. He was of a middle size, with a strong body and dull look, and affected to dislike anything like niceness in apparel. Indeed, his manners were of the rudest, but being an excellent customer of John Shakspeare, he got invited to the christening. At hearing the praises that were so bountifully lavished upon John a Combe, his soul was stirred with a very devilish

envy; and though he said nought—save 'twas to mutter some contemptuous expression, unheard of any but those nighest him—it was easy to be seen that he was in a wonderful ill-humour.

At this time a many of the company were amusing themselves at the game of Barley Break, in the warehouse and places where the wool was stored, and other things in which John Shakspeare dealt; and it did so happen that Master Alderman Dowlas, the draper, was shut up in the middle room with the buxom wife of his neighbour, Master Alderman Malnsey, the vintner, and he must needs be making love to her, though he had as exquisite fair a wife of his own as any honest man need desire. Now this worthless draper was a man of no particular likelihood to fall in with a pretty woman's fantasy, having features by no means comely: a long thin nose, and a mouth about as expressive of any particular affectionateness as a roll of broadcloth. Indeed, there was a sort of sanctimoniousness in the cut of his beard, and the cropping of his hair, and the sober suit of grey in which he was usually apparelled, that seemed to give the flattest contradiction to love of any sort—unless it were the love of godliness and a decent life. Whether what he had been drinking put into his head any such villany, or that he was of a very amorously disposed nature at all times, I know not; but certain it is, he left the table to play at Barley Break—of an equal

surety is it he was, in the course of the game, shut up in the middle room with the young comely wife of his brother alderman; and it is beyond all contradiction that, after flattering "the very infiniteness of her most absolute and inconceivable beauty," as he was pleased to style her somewhat attractiveness, in a sufficiency that ought to have satisfied the vainest woman that ever lived, he, in a monstrous earnestness, swore he loved her better than ought else in the universal world.

"Fie on you, Jonathan Dowlas!" cried the pretty woman, evidently, from the twinkling of her merry dark eyes, taking the affair as an excellent good jest. "I marvel you should so conduct yourself to your friend's wife, and you a godly man too—that hath been married this seven year!—as I live, methinks it is too bad of you."

"Alack, adorable sweet creature!" cried the alderman, twitching his chair as nigh as possible to hers, the which she marked by immediately increasing the distance betwixt them. "'Tis all on account of the insufficiency of the flesh. The flesh rebelleth against all discretion. It stirreth as it were—yea, it be exceedingly moved."

"I would it would move farther off, then," exclaimed his fair companion, as she removed herself a short distance, upon finding him again attempting to get closer to her than she liked."

"Sweet Mistress Malmsey," continued the draper,

very pathetically, "as the hart panteth for the water brooks, doth my enamoured soul thirst after thine incomparable sweet perfections."

"Then you must quench your thirst at other fountains, I promise you," pithily replied the vintner's wife. "My husband hath a famous store of wines. I doubt not, if you would give him an order for some, a draught or so occasionally would do you, out of all comparison, more benefit than would the draining of my incomparable sweet perfections to the dregs; for, take my word for't, you would find me horrible bad drinking."

"Nay, that could never be, my honey-sweet!" exclaimed the Alderman, trying to take her hand, which she presently snatched away from him. "Sooner shall princes wear buckram, and penniless rogues ruffle it in costliest cloth of gold. Believe me, as I love ready money better than credit, and large profits before any loss, I shall grow into a desperation, succeed I not in my suit."

"Your suit is like to go unshod, for it is bootless," answered Mistress Malmsey, with a pretty laugh at her own jest; then added, more seriously, "Marry, to prevent such a mischance as your falling into a desperation, I would acquaint your wife with your desires, and doubt not at all she'd suit you in a presently."

The Alderman looked as if he relished not this raillery. He spoke never a word for a minute or



so. What more he might have said, I know not, for soon after, by the chances of the game, they were released from their imprisonment, and she allowed him no more opportunity of having any such conversation with her that day. In the meanwhile, they at the table were still jovially employed in making good cheer. John a Combe was intent upon setting of every one to enjoy themselves after such fashion as pleased them most, and seeing that all had proper refreshment when their sports had tired them in any way. John Shakspeare was employed in a like manner, and so was his good dame; whereof the consequence was, as hath been acknowledged many times since, that there never was known, at any merry-making, such a general contentation of the guests: and he who was the cause of this great content, lacked no honour which the occasion seemed to warrant. He was praised as bountifully as if each had taken a cue from the nurse—all the women must needs have a kiss of him; and divers among those nigh unto marriageable estate, would not be satisfied without dandling him a bit in their arms—mayhap to shew certain of the young men there, how apt they were at so notable an exercise. At last, having been caressed and praised of all with a liberality that exceedeth conception, amid much regret of the young folks, nurse took him away—as, in sooth, it was high time he should be asleep in his cradle.

Master Buzzard continued at the table eyeing, with a marvellous sour and gloomy aspect, the attentions that were paid to John a Combe; and it fretted him to find that he, for all his greater state, was held in no such estimation. Along with him were Sir Nathaniel, Stripes, and Oliver Dumps; and sometimes others would join them for a time, upon getting weary of their sports; but these four appeared to like nothing so well as continual tippling of such liquors as were before them, seasoned with such talk as persons so disposed were most like to affect.

“It may be, or it may not be,” observed Sir Nathaniel, after rehearsing to his listeners a scandalous story; “but here is a child found, and, as far as my learning may go, I know of no child having been born without the help of a mother. What sayest, Sir Conjuror?”

“There can be no doubt of it, please your reverence,” replied the schoolmaster. “Though it hath been asserted, by divers creditable historians, that Venus sprung from the foam of the sea, and Minerva from the brain of Jove; for mine own part, I would maintain, yet with all due deference, the utter impossibility of any one person coming into this world without having to boast of a mother, and perchance, if there should be no doubt on’t, of a father also.”

“Thou art a fool, old hocus pocus, and no conjuror!” exclaimed the curate, sharply, “a very

fool, and as ignorant as a heathen. Had Adam a mother, or Eve? Surely thou hast forgotten thy Testament—thou Balaam's ass! But thou never wert half so wise an animal as he; for it be well known of all men, that once upon a time, when he was carrying of Potiphar's wife into Egypt, he spake unto Moses, saying, 'Paul! Paul! thou almost persuadest me to be a Christian.'

"Methinks asses must have been wiser in those days than they be now," said the constable, gravely. "My father hath had an ass of his own a long time past, but it never gave any sign of speech."

"It hath begun at last, then—*ecce signum*;" cried Sir Nathaniel, laughing famously, in which he was joined by his companions. "But touching this child. It doth appear that Dame Lucy made discovery of a young child that had been abandoned, as it was said; and as it could not have been Sir Thomas Lucy's, it could not, with any toleration, be Sir Thomas Lucy's wife's. That child the good dame had me christen, some short time since, by the name of Mabel; and she hath resolved, as she told me, to bring it up as her own; the which she must needs do with the perfectest likeness that ever was, for many do say she hath other right to it than that of first discoverer."

"By God's body, it be infamous!" cried Master Buzzard, in a rude loud voice that attracted the attention of all within reach of it. "The vileness

of these women hath no rivalry save the craft with which they hide it. They are traitors to honesty, all of them; and I would as soon believe in the trustworthiness of a cut-purse, as I would in the virtuousness of any one of them."

"An' it please you, Master Buzzard, the Queen's Highness, whose unworthy constable I am, is a woman, as I have heard," here remarked Oliver Dumps, with the air of one who cometh to the resolution of doing his duty though it be unpleasant to him. "And though no later than yesterday I did put in the stocks, for wantonness, one Marian Loosefish, a woman also, as in my conscience I do firmly believe; yet as it seemeth to me it be like to bring her majesty's name into contempt among all her loving subjects—the which be against the law—to say that women be given to all manner of villainy, and to assert, at the same time, that the Queen's Highness is a woman, I must maintain it, by virtue of my office, that if all women may be queans, then is the queen no woman."

"Pooh!" exclaimed Master Buzzard.

"But I will not have it 'pooh,'" cried the constable, raising his voice, and seeming in some indignation. "It be flat contumaciousness, and very sedition. I will allow of it on no account; and I charge you, on your allegiance declare the Queen's Highness no woman, or any such vileness, else will I straight with you to the cage."

"What, wouldst put a gentleman in the cage?" cried Sir Nathaniel, as if in some surprise. "Hath no respect for persons?"

"No, nor for parsons either, should they conduct themselves unadvisedly," answered the little man, determinedly. "I am put in authority for the preservation of the peace, and it behoveth me to keep good heed there be no idle prating like to lead to a brawl."

"The man's an ass," said Master Buzzard, in very evident contempt.

"The man is no ass, Master Buzzard," exclaimed Oliver Dumps, jumping up on his legs in a sort of fury. "And moreover, as can be proved at any time, the man never was an ass, but an honest householder, and the queen's officer; and one who careth only to do whatsoever may be required of him without offence to any man, and seeketh to live as becometh a proper subject of her highness and a good Christian. You have miscalled me villainously, Master Buzzard—I will not put up with any such ill usage from the finest fellow that wears a head. I will have you up at our next hall—you shall be brought before his worship the high bailiff. I will have my action of slander against you, depend on't."

"Hullo, my masters! what hath caused this unseemly to do amongst you?" called out John a Tombe, as, drawn by the constable's loud voice,

and violent manner, he, with others, was attracted to the table. "I marvel, on such an occasion as this, to see any quarrelling. I pray you, say the matter of difference betwixt you, that I may do my best, as speedy as may be, to bring it to an amicable ending."

"Marry, this is it," replied Oliver, in no way abating the greatness of his indignation, whilst Master Buzzard sat with a perfect indifferency, mingled with some scorn, of the whole business, rocking himself on his chair, "Master Buzzard hath given me ill words, and I will have the law of him; moreover, he hath spoke shamefully of the queen's grace, for the which he shall have to make proper amends; and, lastly, he hath insinuated evil opinions of my lady, the wife of his worship Sir Thomas Lucy, in particular, and of all women in general, saying that they be notoriously dishonest, and ever given to unlawful behaviour."

"What he hath spoke ill of you, worthy Master Constable, be sure he said in jest," remarked John a Combe. "And I cannot believe you to be so unneighbourly as to allow of such a thing moving you."

"Nay, but he hath called me an ass, Master Combe, and there be no jest in that as I can see," cried out the offended constable.

"He meant it as a jest depend on't," replied the other.

"Ay, 'twas a jest out of all doubt," here observed Sir Nathaniel, just after draining his goblet. "Didst not take it for a jest, Ticklebreech?" added he, turning to his companion.

"O' my life yes, an' it please your reverence," answered the schoolmaster; "as excellent good jest as ever I heard."

"Well, an' it be a jest, indeed," said Oliver Dumps, in a quieter tone; "believe me I was ignorant of it, else would I have said nought of the matter, for I am not so crabbed as to take offence where none be intended; but what saith he concerning of his ill speech of the queen? that was no jest, at least he will find it none, I warrant you."

"You must have misunderstood his meaning surely?" observed John a Combe. "'Tis not at all in reason that one known to be so well disposed towards her Majesty as is Master Buzzard, should say so much as one single word to her prejudice."

"If he said not all women be mere wantons, count me the lyingest knave in Christendom," asserted the constable with some vehemence.

"Perchance he may have said it, but that he had any such meaning will I never believe," remarked Master Combe.

"I will wager my life on it he had a very different meaning," exclaimed the curate. Then called he to his sworn-fellow, "What sayest, Lanthorn-jaws?"

"Please your reverence, I will vouch for it, his meaning must needs have been of a clean contrary sort," readily answered the schoolmaster.

"Marry then, since that be the opinion of these honest gentlemen, I will not stir in the matter further," said Oliver. "I would torture no man's speech to do him hurt, not I, even though I might be made alderman to-morrow for't. But touching my lady, Sir Thomas Lucy's wife, I heard of a child she had found and bringeth up as her own, of the which if I remember me, Master Buzzard believeth the good lady to be the mother, without consent first had and obtained of his worship, her husband; and this I take it, can be no other than scandalum magnatum—a terrible heinous offence as I have heard."

"I cannot believe Master Buzzard would speak of such a matter, save as the common talk of the vulgar sort, who know no better," said John a Combe. "For mine own part, there is nothing of which I am so well assured as of the wonderful excellence of woman. All that extreme force of rhetoric could speak, or most famous cunning of the pen could describe, in my humble opinion could never give her such sufficient justice as her infinite merits deserve. Whatever there is of goodness—whatever there is of kindness, of pitifulness of heart, and of nobleness of disposition, have their chiefest place in her, and she is the origin of that



marvellous sweet power that gives humanity its rarest excellence, and binds all nature in one unending chain that never rusts, that will not clog, and that cannot be sundered—the links whereof are those endearing sympathies that join to form the universal bondage of the affections. Such bountiful store of graces doth she possess, that although poets from earliest time have been endeavouring to make them known to the world, in our own day such attractions as have escaped notice, are found to be out of all number; and it hath been well asserted, the same is like to continue to latest posterity. Methinks there shall be no need of saying ought to shew what great share she hath in the production of everything that tendeth to happiness in this world, for you cannot help knowing that all true pleasure is of her giving. Of her excellence I would content myself with asking—What virtue is like to a woman's?—What honesty is like to a woman's—What love, what courage, what truth, what generousness, what self-denial, what patience under affliction, and forgiveness for wrong come at all nigh unto such as a woman sheweth? Believe me the man who cannot honour so truly divine a creature, is an ignorant poor fellow, whom it would be a compliment to style a fool; or an ungrateful mean wretch, whom charity preventeth me from calling a villain."

"Thou liest, knave!" shouted Master Buzzard,

starting to his feet, and drawing his rapier, and looking to be in a monstrous deadly rage. "Thou art thyself but a paltry villain as ever lived, and a coward to boot, as I will presently prove—so come on, or I will make no more account of thy pestilent body than I would of a stinking mackerel."

"Aid in the Queen's name, you that be good men and true!" exclaimed the constable, amidst the shrieks of the women and the outcries of the men, as he bustled up between the expected combatants.

"Put down your weapon, Master Buzzard, I pray you," cried John Shakspeare, hastening with others to the scene.

"I will cut off thy ears as a supper for my dogs!" continued Master Buzzard, seeming to increase in his passion.

"A riot! a riot! Surrender you my prisoner in the Queen's name!" added Oliver Dumps, advancing close to the offender, as if with the intention of seizing him.

"Out fool, or I will pin thee to the wall!" shouted Master Buzzard, making a pass at the constable, the which to avoid he made a leap of so prodigious a length, it hath been said he never did such a feat before, or since.

"Oh, here will be a foul murder done!" exclaimed Dame Shakspeare, pitiouly wringing of her hands.

"Come on fellow, and take thy death!" cried Master Buzzard, going furiously at John a Combe, who had got his weapon out in readiness to defend himself, but ere his opponent reached within thrusting distance, John Shakspeare had fast hold of his arm, and others springing on him at the same moment, he was soon deprived of all means of offence.

"I marvel a person of your quality should be for a quarrel at such a time as this," observed his host.

"Is't fitting such a pitiful coxcomb of a fellow should preach to me," cried the other very furiously, striving to break from those who held him.

"Hold him fast, good neighbours!" exclaimed Oliver Dumps, now coming nearer, seeing that his prisoner was disarmed. "Let him go on no account, I pray you. He hath sought to do me deadly injury in the execution of my office, and it cannot but go hard with him at assize."

"I beseech you, pass it over!" said John a Combe. "It was but some sudden heat of temper in him, and I doubt not he will regret it in the morning."

"Away, coward—I spit at thee!" shouted Master Buzzard, in a fiercer rage than ever, as he was being borne out at the door. "I do long to be at thee. I would make more holes in thy body than shall be found in a sieve."

"Bring him along, neighbours," cried the con-

stable ; " We'll spoil this killing humour of his, I promise you."

Master Buzzard was forcibly carried out of the house, yet without any rudeness on the part of his bearers, who, because of his quality, were loth he should be punished for his brawling,—and, after much opposition from Oliver Dumps wanting to be thought the queen's trusty officer, who liked not of an offence being hushed up,—it was agreed that no notice should be taken of it, on condition of the offender's going peaceably home. In the mean time, the guests recovering from their alarm, got to dancing a measure, and other diversions, as if nought had happened to disturb their sports, and went not away till late, vowing that of all the merry meetings they had been at, for the pleasure they had had, none had been like to the christening of William Shakspeare.

## CHAPTER III.

These things begin  
To look like dangers, now, worthy my fates.  
Fortune, I see thy worst ; let doubtful states,  
And things uncertain hang upon thy will ;  
Me surest death shall render certain still.

BEN JONSON.

I held it ever  
Virtue and cunning were endowments greater  
Than nobleness and riches : careless heirs  
May the two latter darken and expend ;  
But immortality attends the former,  
Making a man a god.

SHAKSPEARE.

Their angry looks, their deadly daunting blows,  
Might witness well that in their hearts remained  
As cankered hate, disdain, and furious mood,  
As ever bred in bear or tiger's breast.

GASCOYNE.

“ SAUL, what art doing.”

“ Looking to see that the gesses and bells of this  
tercel gentle be in the properest trim, master.”

“ Ay, well thought of — but, as I have ever  
marked, thou hast wonderful foresight.”

“ Marry, my sight be good enough — methinks I  
can trace a hawk as well as any.”

“ In truth thou hast many commendable qua-  
lities, and I would fain give some token of how  
well esteemed they are of me.”

“ Indeed ! but that be kind of you, master, mon-

strous kind : and as for my qualities, I doubt they be anything out of the common. Peradventure I am as cunning at the rearing of hawks as any fellow in Warwickshire—at quarter staff, wrestling, pitch the bar, running at the quintain, and other games, care for none ; and will dance a morrice, play the hobby-horse in the May games, or take a fling at a Shrove-tide cock, with as much perfectness as you shall see among a thousand.”

His master was silent for a minute or so ; yet his aspect wore a troubled, and by no means pleasing expression, that looked as if he wanted to disburthen his mind of something. For awhile he kept feeding of a hawk he held on his wrist. His companion was a sturdy varlet of some thirty years, with a freckled face, a thick clumsy head, and features expressive of one alike reckless and impudent. He was clad in a forester’s frock of Kendal green, confined at the waist with a belt, having a pocket at the side, below which little could be seen, save his crimson hose and thick buff boots ; and he wore a rapier and a dagger. Of these two the one was Master Buzzard, of whom the reader hath already some knowledge, and the other was his man Saul, his chief favorite and confidant. They were together in the hall, once a fair chamber in Master Buzzard’s house, with a famous timber roof, and a goodly store of old armour hung about, but on account of the great number of hawks and dogs

that were kept in it, some being here and some there—a litter of pups in one corner and a cast of falcons in another, with lurchers, deer-hounds, and spaniels of every kind, running in and out of every hole and corner, with little regard to cleanliness, the place was scarce fit for any human being to be in. All amongst the corslets and plates of mail, were nailed the skins of herons and the tails of foxes; the antlers of a stag, and the heads of divers kinds of wild fowl, badgers, pole-cats, and other vermin; and there seemed to be but little furniture in ordinary use as chair or table, unencumbered with things necessary for hawking, or hunting, or fishing, or some sport of a like nature. On a corner of a long table close to where Master Buzzard was standing, there stood a tray with the remains of a pasty, and a flagon beside it, which was some sign that the place, however unsightly it might be, was not badly off for victual.

“Thou knowest, Saul, how good a master I have been to thee,” continued Master Buzzard.

“Ay, by gog’s blood, that do I!” exclaimed his man with great earnestness, “and many thanks to your worship. I’faith, there is no denying I am well off for a master, for one more cunning in hunting, and hawking, and all such goodly sports—of a more valorous nature let his weapon be what it may; or of a more truly prodigal disposition, upon any proper occasion, I doubt hugely, I should

meet with, sought I ever so. Marry, if your worship is as well off for a servant as am I for a master, then ought we to be envied of all men."

"By God's body, I value not my best goshawk as I do thy faithful service," replied his master, still seeming to keep his attention fixed upon his bird. "In truth, Saul, I do look upon thee as my right-hand, and I do intend, before any very long time hath passed, to shew thee such excellent instance of my good will as must rejoice thee infinitely to see."

"'Fore George! master, I want none such," said his companion, albeit with a marvellous lack of sincerity. "Yet, would I on no account baulk the generousness of your humour. I am not unmindful how oft your worship hath stood between me and harm, when a parcel of poor linsey walsey knaves of the town yonder, went about telling of me the horriblemst slanders that ever was heard."

"Ay, it hath been said of many thou wert he who stabbed Daniel Short, of Barston, who was found dead in the meadow," observed the other, regarding of his goshawk with a more intense earnestness. "But I heeded them not. It was sworn before the high bailiff thou didst misuse Joan Springfield at the town end, and he was for proceeding against thee with as much severity as might be; but I stayed him in the matter. And there was much ado made of thy shooting at Daniel



Buckthorn, of the Mill; and it would have gone hard with thee had I not stepped in and hushed all up."

"Never was man so abused!" exclaimed Saul with a very monstrous vehemency. "I have enemies, master—scores of them, I promise you; and they be such thorough-going cowards and darstardly poor villains as cannot come with any fair weapon before me, and challenge me with the infamy they would lay to my charge, that I might disprove it on their pestilent bodies, but must needs whisper all manner of the horriblest false stuff that ever was uttered, among such pitiful fools as they can get to listen to them. 'Slife, master! there be no living for such knaves, and an honest man might as well go hang at once as be pestered with them. For mine own part, I do think the ridding of the world of any a very commendable thing; and could I meet with one who had been playing his knave's tricks on your worship, or on any other for whom I am so bound, I would slit his weason for him whenever the time served, and none should be the wiser."

A smile of peculiar meaning appeared on the face of Master Buzzard at this intimation.

"Dost know John a Combe?" enquired the latter with an assumed indifferency.

"Know John a Combe!" exclaimed Saul in some surprise, and with a more evident contempt.

"Is he not the errantest skipjack in all the country round?—a fine Sunday gentleman, forsooth! that looks as if he layeth himself up in lavender o' nights that he may smell sweet i' the morning? Why, he is as common as the stocks, and as like to be avoided of all true men as is the pillory or the whipping post. I should as soon expect Gammer Lambswool to inquire for the gossip's bridle, as your worship to ask after John a Combe. 'Sblood! he taketh upon him, too, to come Master Perfection over us, and must needs be seeking to be thought an example of goodness, and wisdom, and every virtue under the sun, thinking to be as famous as Sir Guy of Warwick. I would forfeit a year's wages found I not more virtue in a bunch of nettles than you shall discover in him, search you from now till doomsday."

Master Buzzard sought not to interrupt his man in his speech, for a very excellent reason—because it was much to his liking, the which the other knew full well; for he was a cunning knave, that ever studied to jump with his master's humour at all times, and was aware of what had passed betwixt him and Master Combe, and moreover, was willing enough to reap advantage of it.

"Indeed, I take him to be as scurvy a fellow as any that lives," observed Master Buzzard with wonderful bitterness.

"That is he, out of all doubt," replied his man

in much the same sort of spirit. "I hate such popinjays. It be monstrous fine certainly for such a paltry knave as he is to be ever schooling of your worship, as it were——"

"I tell thee, Saul, I will endure his swaggering airs no longer !" exclaimed Master Buzzard, interrupting his man with great fierceness. "He is ever thrusting himself in my way—a murrain on him ! I cannot do as is my wont for his pestilent meddling. Wherever he is I must need play mumchance. All run to John a Combe—all bend to John a Combe—all listen to John a Combe ! 'Slife ! it maketh me mad to see him so noticed, so praised, so courted, whilst his betters must be thrust aside as worthy of no better heed than a mangy cur."

"Doth the caitiff ruffle it so bravely ?" enquired the other. "Well, never heard I of such thorough impudency. But what ignorant poor fools must be they who would be led by him ! Marry ! I am so moved with indignation at the slights put on your worship by so paltry a villain, that I know not what mischief I should be ready to do him."

"But that is not the worst of it," continued his master with more vehemence. "He hath put on me intolerable affronts, and as yet all attempts, seek I when I would, to be revenged of him, have been bootless. No later than this very morning, scarce an hour gone, meeting him alone in the

back lane, I drew upon him, thinking I had him sure; but the villain carried some amulet or devilish charm; for though I made my deadliest thrusts with all the skill of which I am master, he remained unhurt, and in a short space my weapon was sent flying out of my hand a full twenty yards; whereupon, with a Judas smile, the villain bowed to me, and wishing me 'good day,' took himself off on the instant."

"O' my life! 'twas but a coward's trick, master!" cried Saul. "I marvel you did not after him and stick him as he went."

"By this hand, I would gladly have done it!" exclaimed his master. "But I was so confounded at the flight of my rapier, and at the fellow's assurance, that I knew not what to be at, and ere I had resolved, he had gone clean out of sight. Doubtless he will go bruiting it abroad, as far as he can, how he had me at his mercy and spared my life. 'Slife!" continued he with an exceeding uneasy and malignant look with him, "methinks I am poorly served when such a fellow as this can do me all manner of offence, and go unharmed."

"Nay, by your leave, master, not so," quickly answered Saul, "when you have had my service in this business, I will be bold to say you shall not count yourself poorly served."

"I would I could be well rid of him," said Master Buzzard in a lower voice.

"If it please you, master, let that be my care," observed the other.

"I hear that he is oft to be met with after dark in the narrow lane at the town end," observed Master Buzzard, his voice gradually sinking to a whisper.

"A goodly place, and a goodly time too," added the other with a sort of half audible laugh, "but mayhap his worship shall choose to go there once too often." Thus went they on, as bad men do concert their villainies, half ashamed to look each other in the face, and as their intentions became manifest, dropping their voices to a close whisper, that the evil they would be about might not be heard of any. But in this I can follow them no longer, having game in view more worthy of the reader's attention.

There was a hall to be holden at the town that day, at which the aldermen and others of the corporation had been summoned in such terms as shewed it to be a matter of the very hugest importance that called them together. Whether it related to certain intelligence of some rebellion broke out against the Queen's Highness, to risings of the papists, or to rumours of invasion from the Spaniards, seemed not to be clearly ascertained; for among the honest burgesses who had got note of this extraordinary meeting there were heard as many reasons for it as there were tongues to speak

them, whereof the general belief at last rested upon the three above named. That nothing threatened to affect the immediate safety of the town was apparent from the usual air of carelessness and security that prevailed throughout the principal street. Here might be seen a troop of boys fresh broke out from school, hallooing like mad; there a knot of a meaner sort at play, whilst a little one from the school, though hastening home to his parents, kept casting behind him a wistful look, as if he did long to join in their pastime. One or two big dogs were seen stretched at their length by their master's doors, and now and then some one or another of a smaller kind would dart out of a doorway, yelping at the heels of the noisy children, till one more courageous than his fellows would up with a stone, and send him back yelping louder than he came, making the tailor leap from his board, the cordwainer throw down his lapstone, and the apprentice leave his work, to see what was the hubbub. Here and there careful mothers were calling out of their casements to hasten home their boys, or some provident housewife would be casting a store of victual for the feeding of her stock of fowls, who, with fluttering wings and eager throats, would be seen eagerly flocking towards her.

In several places, there might be observed some two or three of the neighbours conversing soberly and with great shew of earnestness, more particu-

larly about the doors of the principal burgesses ; and in front of the casements of Master Alderman Malmsey, the vintner, where there was a famous group, with a horseman in the midst, looking to be so busy of speech as to pay but little heed to the tankards and drinking horns held by some of them. Opposite was the dwelling of Master Alderman Dowlas, the draper, with its lower windows shewing divers rolls of cloth of sundry colours, whilst at the open casement above sat his buxom fair wife, with Mistress Malmsey at her side, plying of her needle with a very commendable industry, and as it seemed, using her tongue with a like speed. Coming down the street was a drove of cows, some of which must needs put their heads in the water-trough before the inn, thinking to have a good drink, but the stable boys would not allow of it, for they drove them off presently, by throwing up their arms, and making a great shouting. A little curly-haired child scarce big enough to run alone, was standing in the midst of the road, mooing at the cattle as bold as you please, and putting out its little hands as if to prevent them going further ; and an elder sister, with a marvellous anxious frightened face, was rushing from a neighbouring door-way to hurry him out of danger. All the casements, and nearly all the doors, stood invitingly open, for it was a hot summer's day at the latter end of June, and every where there were signs of a desire to be relieved of

the oppressive sultriness of the atmosphere, either by seeking of the shady place, or where a draught of cooler air might be gained, or by drinking of tankards of cider and other refreshing liquors, wherever they might be had.

For all this gossiping and carelessness on every side, it was noted that one or two of the elder aldermen who were going to the hall, wore visages of exceeding gravity, and seemed intent upon avoiding the approaches of such of their townsmen as they met in their way, with looks so suspicious and fearful, that the latter knew not what to make of it. Presently, there came by John Shakspeare and Master Combe, likewise on their way to the hall; but they looked to be in a more serious humour even than the aldermen, and would on no account stop for any, which was the more strange, because both were well known to be of a most friendly spirit, and had ever cheerfully answered any man's salutation.

“Whither so fast, my master?” shouted Sir Nathaniel, as he popped his fat rosy face out at the casement to call them. “Dost pass so exquisite a house of entertainment as this, at the pace thou art going, when the sun seemeth to be intent upon making of us so many St. Bartholomews? Two rabid dogs could not have behaved less reasonably towards good liquor. Prythee, come and share



with us, and doubt not being welcome, even if thou pay for all."

To this invitation the two merely shook their heads and continued on their way, to the huge discontent of the curate and the schoolmaster, who, at the sight of them, expected to have had at least an extra tankard or two without hurt to their own purses.

John Shakspeare and his friend then proceeded without further hindrance to the church, and soon afterwards entered the vestry—a chamber of no great dimensions, furnished only with a long table, at the head of which was a high-backed chair, and on each side were a couple of benches. In the chair was the high bailiff, one Timothy Mallet, the wheelwright. Opposite, on a low stool, with a many papers and two or three huge books before him, sat the diminutive form of Jemmy Catchpole, the town lawyer, who was said to be so learned in the law as to be fitter to be a judge of assize than any living. His sharp grey eyes twinkled with a perpetual restlessness, and his parchment-skin seemed growing of a deeper yellow, as, with pen in his hand, he watched or made notes of the matter proceeding. On each side were seated such of the aldermen as attended, likewise others of the corporation who were not of the aldermen; and Master Alderman Malmsey, with his purple-in-grain coun-

tenance and very puncheon of a person, who affected the orator in no small measure, was on his legs, if such round things as he had might be so called, denouncing with a monstrous vehemency a motion, then under discussion, for repairing the parish well. Some listened to him attentively, others were conversing apart; but it might have been noted, that a few wore aspects so anxious as plainly shewed their minds were intent on another matter. His argument was to the effect, that water was a thing which all honest men ought to eschew, unless as at the marriage at Cana it could be turned into wine, and that wine was a thing most absolute and necessary to every man's well doing: therefore, it would be much better to buy a pipe of such fine hippocras as he could sell them, for the use of the corporation, than to apply any of its funds for the repairing of so unprofitable a thing as a well. At this, upstarted at once a baker and a butcher, swearing with equal vehemency, that nothing was so necessary as plenty of bread and meat, and advocating the greater laudableness of laying in a store of such victual, which they could not do better than have of them, to wasting the corporation funds in the project that had so injudiciously been proposed. Others might have followed in a like strain, but at this instant John Shakspeare, who had waited with his stock of patience getting to be less and less every moment, now rose, and with his honest face

somewhat pale and of an uneasy expression, proceeded to take a share in the debate. It was noticed that on his rising, the few who had appeared so unmindful of what was going on, looked marvelously attentive; and the others, as if curious to know what one so well esteemed had to say on the matter, were no less careful listeners.

“I pray you, lose not the precious time in such idle stuff as this,” exclaimed he. “We want your wisest counsel. We are threatened with such calamity as is enough at the mere thought of it, to strike us dead with fear. We cannot thrust it aside. It hath come upon us unprepared. All that can be done is to endeavour to keep the mischief in as narrow a compass as may be possible. Up and, be doing, then, my masters, without a moment’s delaying, for the negligence of one may be the destruction of all.”

At the hearing of this discourse, so different from what all, excepting the anxious few, expected, the greater number stared in absolute astonishment, and the rest waited as if in expectation of hearing what was to follow.

“My friends!” continued the speaker, in a low, thick voice, as if he could scarce speak, “*The plague is in Stratford!*”

“The plague?” exclaimed many in the same moment of time, leaning forward from their seats, breathless with horror and surprise.

“I would to God there could be a doubt of it!” replied John Shakspeare. “My worthy and approved good friend, Master Combe, of whose honourableness there can be none here present who have not had excellent evidence, hath, in one of the manifold generous offices he is ever intent upon doing to his poorer neighbours, made this doleful discovery; and with the advice of divers of the most experienced of my fellow burgesses, who alone knew of it from me, I have had you here assembled, that you might learn from him the exact truth, and then consider amongst yourselves which be the fittest way of providing for the common safety.”

At this there was a dead silence; and when Master Combe stood up, every eye was strained to scrutinize him, and every ear stretched forward to hear the most distinctly the promised communication.

“I pray you, my worthy neighbours and friends, fear nothing!” exclaimed John a Combe, “fear will only make you the victim of what you dread; but courage and good conduct will help you to drive the pestilence from your door. That it doth exist amongst us, I would I could doubt; and this is how I came at the knowledge of it. Hearing that there was a poor family visited with a sudden sickness, of which some were like to die had they not help presently, I speeded thither with what medicines I usually carry on such occasions, knowing them to

be of especial benefit in divers disorders. In a low cottage, ruinous, and exceeding dirty, I came upon the sufferers. As God me save, I there saw a sight such as I have not seen in my whole life before; and trust in Jesu never to see again. I entered at the kitchen, where, in one corner, on a litter of rushes, I beheld one dead—the father of this wretched family—and, by his side, his wife in the last agonies; the fixed stare of whose yellow eyeballs settling into death, I saw, at a glance, made all help of medicine out of the case. A babe was crawling on the floor towards her; but it had a sickly look with it that was ghastly to see. In another corner was a young girl dead also, her fair face getting to be discoloured and unsightly; and in a chair was a boy who, by his dress, I knew was used to labour in the fields, and he complained he felt so deadly bad he could not return to his work. I went into another chamber, where was the old grannam, lying upon a truckle bed, moaning terribly, but saying nought; and doubled up at her feet was the figure of another ancient dame, who had been her nurse till she dropped where she was, and could not be got to move hand or foot. I was informed, by a charitable neighbour who came in with me, that this illness had only appeared amongst them since the preceding night, soon after unpacking of a parcel they had received by the carrier from some friends in London. On hearing this I had a sudden mis-

giving, for I had received certain intelligence the day previous, that the pestilence had broke out there. My heart was too full to speak; and when I was further told, that in addition to the inmates of the cottage, sundry of the neighbours who had called in, hearing of their sickness, had been taken with a like disorder, one of whom had given up the ghost not half an hour since, my suspicion took firmer ground. Presently I examined one of the dead. My fears then received terrible confirmation. The plague spot was upon him. Having given such orders as I thought necessary, without exciting any alarm, I fumigated myself well, and acquainted my good friend, John Shakspeare, with the fearful truth, and by his advice you have been called here to take instant measures to prevent the spreading of this direful calamity. In whatsoever thing I may be of service at this unhappy time, I pray you use me as one friend would use another. Believe me, I will do it lovingly, whatever may be required."

Though the speaker concluded what he had to say, for some moment's space none sought to interrupt the awful silence which followed; but sat like so many statues of fear, with eyes almost starting from their sockets, mouths partly open, and big drops of perspiration standing upon their wrinkled foreheads. Of the most terrified was the little lawyer upon the stool, who, leaning his elbows on the table, and with his pointed chin resting upon

his palms, kept his sharp eyes fixed upon John a Combe, looking more frightened as the other proceeded in his narration, till he gave voice to his consternation in an audible groan. Presently, some began to turn their gaze from Master Combe to each other, and finding in every face the horror so visible in their own, they remained stupified and bewildered, till one nigh unto the door rushed out, and with the look of one struck with a sudden frenzy, ran home, shouting at the top of his voice, "The plague! the plague!" and many others of that assembly, put out of all discretion by the greatness of their fear, made from the place with as much speed of foot as they could use, in the hope of securing the safety of themselves and families. They that were left then proceeded to take counsel among themselves what was fittest to be done; and Master Combe being invited by them to assist in their deliberations, did give such excellent advice, that it was agreed to by all, with wonderful admiration of his wisdom and greatness of heart; and they sat for several hours making resolutions in accordance with what he had proposed.

"I cannot hear of a denial," said Master Combe to John Shakspeare, as they were returning together from the hall. "This can now be no proper place for your sweet wife and her young son, or any of her family. Stay they here, it must be at the hazard of their lives, for none can say who shall escape;

whilst if they seek refuge in my poor dwelling till the danger hath passed, they need have communication with none, and so shall be in no peril."

"In honest truth I like it well, Master Combe, and am much beholden to you for your friendly care," replied his companion. "Yet am I fearful of accepting of your courtesy, thinking it may put you to inconvenience, and to some danger also."

"Speak not of it, an' you love me," said the other, with a very sincere earnestness; "it is at your entire disposal, as long as it may be at your need. As for myself, *this* is my place. Whilst so many of my neighbours are in such imminent peril, here will I remain to do them whatever office may be expedient for their good."

"An' if it please you, worthy sir, I will assist you with what humble ability I have," added John Shakspeare; "I will take order that my dame and her babe proceed forthwith, with their attendants, to the security provided for them; for which sweet kindness I and mine shall feel bound to you ever after, and will make provision for her having all things necessary; and then I will hold myself in readiness to do whatsoever you shall think fittest."

"I would accept of no help in this matter sooner than your own," answered Master Combe; "knowing your thorough honesty and well disposedness, as I do; yet, methinks, you shall find sufficient in this strait to watch over the safety of those dearest to



you, and cannot advisedly, when they are looking to you for help, put your life in jeopardy for the security of others."

"Nay, by your leave, Master Combe, though I am no scholar, I cannot allow of that," exclaimed John Shakspeare, with some eagerness; "methinks my duty to my neighbours calleth me to their assistance when they shall require it of me, quite as loudly as it may yourself."

"But forget you how many are dependant on your exertions for an honest living, which is not my case," answered his companion.

"I will see to their safety, and I will look with as much care as I may to my own," said the other earnestly; "but, in mine own opinion, I should be deserving of the good-will of none, were I to slink away when danger was at the heels of my friends, and leave them to stand it as they might, whilst I cared only for the safety of myself and what belonged to me."

"Your hand, honest John Shakspeare!" cried Master Combe, shaking his friend's hand very heartily in his own. "Believe me, I love you all the better for having such notions. But I must down this lane," continued he, as they stood together at the corner; "I beseech you hasten your sweet wife as much as you can, that she may out of the town with as little delaying as need be at such a time, and I will with all convenient speed to my

house to prepare for her reception. A fair good night to you, neighbour."

"God speed you, worthy sir, in all you do!" exclaimed the other, with the same friendly feeling, as Master Combe proceeded on his way. "There wends as good a man as ever broke bread!" continued he, when the object of his praise was out of hearing; and he stood where he was for some minutes, leaning on his staff, with his honest heart full of admiration, watching the progress of his companion, till a turning of the lane hid him from his view. It was now just upon twilight, and the lane being bordered by tall trees, closely planted, and in their fullest foliage, a great portion of it was in deep shadow; but this seemed only to make more fresh and vivid the high bank on the other side, which led up into a corn-field, whereof the rich yellow ears, and the crimson poppies blushing beneath them, as seen in every gap of the hedge, gave promise of abundant harvest; and the hedge being of elder, in great patches of blossom, looked at a distance like unto pure white linen a drying on the green branches. John a Combe, as he walked along, noticing the quick movements of the bats, whirling here and there in quest of such insects as formed their victual, on a sudden had his eye attracted by a gleam of light on the opposite bank, which at first he took to be a glow-worm, but the next moment distinguished a large black mass

moving in the deep shadow; the which he had scarce made out to be the figure of a man, when two men, armed and masked, rushed upon him from that very spot. As quick as lightning his rapier was out, and he on his defence. A muttered execration was all he heard, as they came upon him both at once, in such a sort as proved they would have his life if they could. John a Combe was on the brink of a dry ditch, and within a few yards of a gate leading to the corn-field, over against which was an opening in the trees, that gave a fair light to see all around; and for this he made, defending himself the whilst so briskly that neither of his opponents could get him at an advantage. Here having got himself without hurt of any kind, he put his back to the gate, and now seeing that he had before him two stout varlets in masks, who pressed on him as though they would not be baffled in their aims, he presently put forth what cunning of fence he had, and so nimble was his steel, and so quick his movements, that he avoided every thrust. This, however, only seemed to make them the more savage and desperate, and they pressed closer upon him. What might have been the end on't had things gone on, I cannot take on me to determine; but the conflict was stopped much sooner than was expected of any, for one of the two was felled to the earth from an unseen hand, and the other varlet at the same moment

got such a thrust in his wrist, as made him incapable of any mischief.

“Lie there, caitiff!” exclaimed John Shakspeare, who, loitering at the top of the lane, had heard the clash of the weapons, and hastening to the spot, had come in time to deal a blow with his staff that rid his friend of the fiercest of his assailants. “Lie there, for a pitiful coward and a knave to boot. I doubt not hanging be too good for thee, thou murderous villain, to seek the life of one of so excellent a nature. But thou hast not done amiss in hiding of thy face, for I warrant we shall find rascal writ in every line of it. As I live, Master Buzzard!” cried he in some surprise, as he took off the mask of him he had knocked down.

“And here have we no bigger a villain to help him than his man Saul!” exclaimed John a Combe, as he tore off the visor of the other. Master Buzzard came to himself presently, for he was but little hurt, and finding he had been so completely baffled, he said never a word. As soon as he regained his footing, with a look of devilish malignity he took himself off, leaving his man to follow as he best might. Neither received hindrance from Master Combe or his trusty friend—who were in truth monstrous glad to be rid of the company of such thorough paced villains.

## CHAPTER IV.

And what's a life ? A weary pilgrimage  
 Whose glory in one day doth fill the stage  
 With childhood, manhood, and decrepit age.  
 And what's a life ? The flourishing array  
 Of the proud summer meadow, which, to-day,  
 Wears her green plush, and is to-morrow—hay.

QUARLES.

How now ! Ah me !

God and all saints be good to us !

BEN JONSON.

Death may usurp on nature many hours,  
 And yet the fire of life kindle again  
 The overpressed spirits.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE house of John a Combe, so handsomely offered by him for the reception of Dame Shakspeare and her infant son, lay about a mile from Stratford, the nighest way across the fields; and had been built some twenty years in a famous quaint pretty style, with projecting gables, curiously formed and carved; a latticed porch, whereon all manner of delicate flowers were climbing very daintily, and it was enclosed with its garden in a high wall that had iron gates, in an arch-way in front, from which a broad path led on each side of a well kept lawn right up to the house.

Dame Shakspeare had a famous fire of good logs burning in her chamber, the light whereof

shewed the goodly hangings of the bed, and rich arras brought from beyond seas that were about the wainscot, with all the store of needful furniture in high presses, cup-boards, chairs, tables, and the like, exquisitely carved in choice woods that stood around her on every side. The good dame, clad in a simple long garment of linen that wrapt her all around, sat at some short distance from the fire dogs, knitting of a pair of hose, whilst over against her sat nurse Cicely, with the babe in her lap—the front of his white frock hid under a dowlas cloth, that was carefully tucked under his chin—feeding him with a pap spoon. Nurse talked on without ceasing, gossiping to the mother, and prattling to the babe, all in a breath: but Dame Shakspeare scarce spoke a word. Indeed, her thoughts were in a strange misgiving humour, fearing for the present, and doubting of the future, till her eye would light on her sweet son; and then noticing of his exceeding happiness at what he was about, her aspect would catch a sudden brightness, and mayhap she would say something, as if there was nought to trouble her.

“Of those who are dead some say there is no knowing for the number,” continued nurse. “They die out of all calculation; not here and there one, as in honest fashion they should, but everywhere scores. Humphrey heard, at the gate, of Oliver Dumps, that they went so fast, it was supposed

there would soon be none left to tend the sick. Ods lifelings, what an appetite thou hast!" added she, as she kept feeding of the child. " Beshrew my heart, but thou would'st eat up house and home kept thou this fashion at all times. Well, it's all one. They that are dead cannot help themselves; and for the living they must trust in God's mercy. How now chuck? What more! Well, heaven send thee good store of victuals! By my troth, methinks Master Combe shall deserve well of us all our days. As for myself, I would I could know the service I might do his worship, I would not spare my old bones, I promise you. He hath been a mean for the preserving of our lives, that be a sure thing; for it standeth to reason, had we remained in the town, we should have been no better than loathsome corpses long since."

Dame Shakspeare replied not; but her nature was too forcibly impressed with the load of obligation she lay under, not to assent to all her attendant would express on that point.

" And thou hast especial reason to be thankful to him, my young master," continued the old woman, to her charge; " by'r lady, thou hadst best make haste to be a man, and shew his worship how grateful of heart thou art for his goodness. And then to put us all in so delectable a place as this," added she, looking round the chamber in evident admiration. " O' my life, 'tis a house fit for a prince, and

it hath in it every thing that heart could desire. This is his worship's own bed-chamber as I have heard. Happy the woman who shall have the owning of it, say I ! I protest when I hear how nobly he hath borne himself throughout the dreadful raging of this doleful pestilence, I am clean lost in wonder and astonishment at his infinite goodness."

"Surely, nurse, it must be somewhat beyond the time they usually come?" here exclaimed Dame Shakspeare ; "I hope nought amiss hath happened to either, and yet I fear. Alack, it would go hard with me were I to lose my husband; and Master Combe hath shewed himself so true a friend I could not but grieve at his loss. I pray God, very heartily, both are safe."

"Amen !" said the nurse, very devoutly. "But keep up a good heart, I pray you, mistress. I would wager my life on't no harm shall happen to them. They must needs be much too useful to be spared when such pitiful work is going forward. But, concerning of the time of their usual coming, I cannot think it hath yet arrived, though mayhap it shall be found to be no great way off. Peradventure, rest you patient awhile, you shall hear Humphrey give us note of their approach before long. Ha ! my young rogue !" continued she, addressing the babe, and fondling him very prettily, upon finding he would take no more of her food.



“ I warrant me now thou hast had a famous meal ! Art not ashamed to devour such monstrous quantities, when victual is so scarce to be had ? O’ my conscience, he laugheth in my very face ! By your patience, mistress, this son of yours is no other than a very horrible young reprobate, for he seemeth to care for nought when he hath all that he standeth in need of.”

“ Bless his dear heart !” cried the much-delighted mother, rousing up from her melancholy at sight of her babe’s enjoyment. “ It glads me more than I can speak, to see him looking so hearty, and in so rare a humour. But I must to the casement, I am impatient of this seeming long delay ;” and so saying, she suddenly rose from her seat, and made for the window—a broad casement which looked out over the porch, for the chamber was above the ground-floor, and opening it, she leaned out to watch for her husband. The night had set in, though it was scarce eight of the clock, but being the latter end of October that was no marvel. Dark clouds were floating heavily in the sky, and the trees, though half denuded of their foliage, made a famous rustling as the wind came sweeping among their branches. Every thing looked indistinct and shadowy within the range of sight, and beyond, all seemed as though closely wrapt up in a shroud. Certes, to one of Dame Shakspeare’s disposition, the prospect around must have ap-

peared wonderful melancholy, and it gave a chill to her heart that filled her with monstrous disquietude. All was in perfect silence and solitude, save down below, where Humphrey, armed with a rusty harquebus, was marching to and fro within the gate, of which station he was exceeding proud, as was manifest; for, immediately he caught sight of his mistress at the casement, he held his piece firm to his side, made himself look as tall as he might, and with a terrible valorous countenance, as he supposed, continued to walk backwards and forwards at his post.

“Hast seen anything, Humphrey?” enquired Dame Shakspeare.

“Yes, mistress, an’ it please you,” replied he, stopping short in his walk, and holding of himself as upright as any dart. “I have seen old Gammer Lambswool’s two sandy coloured pigs making for home with all the speed of foot they were master of.”

“Psha! hast seen any thing of thy master?” added the good dame.

“No, mistress!” answered he.

“Hast seen ought of Master Combe?”

“No, mistress.”

Hearing no further questioning, Humphrey continued his marching; and his mistress, in no way satisfied with his intelligence, remained at the casement silent and abstracted. She could hear nurse

Cicely walking up and down the chamber, evidently by her speech and occasional humming, striving to get the boy into a sleep. Presently, in a shrill trembling voice, yet not without some spice of tune in it, the old woman commenced singing of the following words:—

NURSE CICELY'S LULLABY.

“ Hush thee, sweet babe ! Eve's curtains o'er us hover,  
In tuneless lullabies low moans the wind ;  
And the tired day (hid in his cloak's dark cover)  
Pillowed on Earth's green lap hath now reclined.  
Hush thee, sweet babe !

Silent since noon hath been the joyful hymning,  
Which, since the blushing morn, thrilled all the air ;  
In the clear stream no unseen hand is limning  
Delicate blossoms coyly glancing there.  
Hush thee, sweet babe !

Lo ! to invite thee to the land of slumber  
The choicest beauties of the daintiest bowers  
Call to the lovingest of all their number—  
' Close thy fair eyes and join thy sister flowers.'  
Hush thee, sweet babe !”

These verses sounded more like unto the song of some fairy than an old nurse's ditty, as Dame Shakspeare thought; but there was no denying it was of the old woman's singing.

“ Well, never saw I the like !” exclaimed Cicely, in tones of such monstrous astonishment as drew the mother's attention in an instant. “ Instead of get-

ting into a good sound sleep as I was assured thou hadst fallen into, I know not how long since, here art thou as wide awake as am I, and listening to my poor singing with a look as if thy very heart was in it." Certes, it was as the nurse had said. The babe lay in her arms, seeming in such strange wonder and delight as surely no babe ever shewed before. Even Dame Shakspeare marvelled somewhat to note the amazed smiling aspect of her young son.

"By my fay!" continued the old woman, "If this babe come not to be some great master of music I am hugely mistaken in him. I remember me now, this is the first time I have chanced to sing in his hearing. Marry, an' if his worship be so taken with my music, I warrant me he shalt have a rare plenty of it, for I have as famous a store of ballads as any woman in Warwickshire."

"I doubt not they will be well liked of him, judging of the manner he hath taken the first he hath heard," observed his mother.

At this moment there was heard such horrible unnatural screaming and strange uproar, that made Dame Shakspeare, more full of misgiving than ever, rush back to the casement with as much speed as she could use. The first object that met her eye was no other than Humphrey, half lying on the ground, supporting himself with one arm and one leg doubled under him. and with the other hand holding in his

trembling grasp the harquebus he made so brave a shew with a few minutes since. He was shaking in every limb ; his hat had fallen off, leaving his face the more visible, which bore an aspect of the completest fright ever seen. His eyes were starting forward, his cheeks pale, and his mouth half open, one jaw knocking against the other as hard as they could. Turning her gaze in the direction in which the boy was staring, as if incapable of moving away his eyes, though for a single instant, she saw a sight the horribleness of which made her scream outright. It was a spectral figure at the gate, with long bare arms and legs, all livid and ghastly, and a face that seemed more terrible to look on than death itself. The pestilence in its worst stage was apparent in every feature ; and the glaring eye, blue skin, gaunt jaws, and ragged beard, were more distinguishable for the sheet in which the head and part of the body were wrapped. He shook the iron bars of the gate as if he would have them down, and tried to climb them, all the whilst giving out such piercing shrieks as made the blood run cold to hear.

“ Jesu preserve the child ! ” exclaimed the terrified mother.

“ Flames and the rack ! ” shouted a hollow sepulchral voice, as he shook the iron bars again and again. “ Hell rages in my every vein ! Fires eat into my heart ! O mercy ! ” Then arose

another scream more wild and piercing than any that had preceded it, and the poor wretch flung his head about, and twisted his limbs as if in the horriblest torture.

“Drive him away, good Humphrey!” cried Dame Shakspeare, the sense of her child’s danger overcoming all other feelings in her.

“Ye—ye—ye—yes, mistress!” answered Humphrey as plainly as his fright would allow him, but moved he never an inch.

“Oh, the good God!” shrieked the diseased man in his frenzy. “Oh, the Infinite Great One! This is the day of doom! Hide—hide, ye wicked!—the ministers of judgment compass ye all about. There is no ’scape from the consuming fire. It scorches my flesh—it burneth my bones to ashes. Ah!” and again the same horrible yell pierced the air as he writhed under his pains.

“Humphrey, I say, drive him away, I prythee!” cried the frightened mother more earnestly than at first. “Alack! if he should break in now we are clean lost!”

“Ye—ye—yes, mistress!” muttered Humphrey, but he sought not to move either his eyes from the man, or his limbs from the ground. However, it did so fall out that the terrible cause of all their fear, after spending of his strength in vainly essaying to shake down the gates, screaming and calling after the fashion that hath been told, in the height

of his frenzy fell from the place he had climbed to down to the hard ground within the walls, where, after twisting himself about for some few seconds in the horriblemest contortions, and shrieking as if in the last agonies, he finally lay stiff, silent, and manifestly dead.

“Humphrey ! Humphrey ! get you in doors this instant !” exclaimed his mistress in a manner as though she scarce knew what she said. Then wringing of her hands exceeding pitifully exclaimed in a lower voice, “Woe is me ! the plague will be upon us, and no remedy.”

Dame Shakspeare had called to Humphrey many times, and though he answered her at first, he paid but small attention to her commands, but when the frightful object got within the walls, he did nought but keep regarding of his motions with an uneasy stare, as if his wits had clean gone; and now his mistress again called to him, he moved not, nor spoke a word, nor gave any sign, save the loud chattering of his teeth, that he was one of the living. Presently there was heard the sound as of sundry persons running, and ere any very long time there appeared at the gate divers of the town watch and others, with torches and lanthorns, armed with long staves and other weapons.

“Get you in, dame, I pray you, and shut to the casement,” cried Master Combe from among them.

“In with you, in God’s name, or you are lost !”

almost at the same moment of time shouted John Shakspeare; and his wife, with a hurried ejaculation of her great comfort at hearing of their voices, did as she was bid, and sunk into a chair more dead than alive.

“I would rather have given a thousand pounds than he should have escaped,” said Master Combe. “I pray God no harm come of it to your sweet wife and children.”

“I cannot help but fear, the peril is so great,” replied John Shakspeare in a somewhat desponding tone.

“Lord ha’ mercy upon us!” muttered a voice not far off of them.

“As I live, ’tis my knave Humphrey!” exclaimed his master, looking through the bars of the gate. “Why how now! what art doing there? Get thee in by the back way on the instant, and stir not till we are gone.”

“La! what be that you, master, indeed?” cried out Humphrey with a sort of foolish joy, as he recognised the voice.

“Get thee in, I tell thee!” replied the other sharply, and Humphrey not caring to take another look at the dead man, walked himself off, and soon disappeared behind the house; whereupon his master with a key he had, opened the gate, and by the directions of Master Combe, the corpse was presently placed upon a hand-barrow, and carried



away by the watchmen ; then a fire of dry sticks was made on the spot where it had fallen, in which certain aromatics were flung, which made a cloud of smoke that filled the air all round about for a great space. After it had burned some time, John Shakspeare called to his wife that she might ope the casement, and she waited no second calling. Then passed they nigh upon an hour in very comfortable discourse one with another, as if it was a customary thing of them, she leaning out of the chamber, and her husband and worthy Master Combe standing upon the lawn beneath, close wrapped up in long cloaks, and carrying lighted torches in their hands.

“ I cannot express to you how glad I am to hear of the abating of the pestilence,” said Dame Shakspeare. “ ’Tis the pleasantest news I have heard this many a day. But think you it may be relied on ? ”

“ I have taken the very surest means of proving its perfect credibleness,” answered Master Combe.

“ Not so many have died of it to-day by twenty as died yesterday,” added her husband ; “ and yesterday we buried ten less than the day before.”

“ I am infinitely thankful ! ” exclaimed she in a famous cheerfulness. “ I heartily pray it may continue so.”

“ So do we all, sweet dame,” answered Master Combe. “ And I have good assurance, now we are blessed with the prayers of one so worthy, we can-

not help but speed in our endeavours. But the night wears on apace. I pray you pardon me for hurrying away your husband. O' my life I would not do it only we have that to look to this night, which cannot be done without him."

"Ay, Dame, we must be going," added her husband. "So a good sweet rest to thee, and kiss my boy lovingly for me, I prythee."

"That will I, dear heart, without fail," answered she. "And a fair good night to you both, and may God above preserve you in all perils."

"Good night, sweet dame, and infinite thanks for your kind wishes," said Master Combe; and then he and his associate left the house, locking the gates after them; and proceeded straight to the town.

Now was there a wonderful difference in this town of Stratford to what it had been only a few months since, when I sought the picturing of it; for in place of all the pleasant riot of children and general gossiping of neighbours, all was dumb as a churchyard; save at intervals, the wail of the sorrowful or the shriek of the dying disturbed the awful stillness. Scarce a living creature was to be seen excepting the watchman keeping guard, to whom divers of the unhappy burgesses would talk to out of their windows, enquiring who of their friends were yet spared, or one or two having been close prisoners in their own houses would creep

stealthily along the street to breathe the fresher air, looking about them suspiciously and in great dread, and ready to fly at any unusual sound; and instead of the sun throwing its warm beams upon the house-tops and other open places, there was a sullen darkness every where about, except just where one carried a torch or a lanthorn with him which made a faint red light thereabouts, or when the moon burst out of the deep black clouds, and disclosed to view the deserted streets grown over with patches of rank grass; the melancholy houses,—many untenanted because of the pestilence having spared none there,—divers with a red cross upon their doors in evidence that the plague had there found a victim, and the rest with doors and windows carefully barred and lights streaming through the closed shutters—a glad sign that there at least none had yet fallen.

John Shakspeare and Master Combe, closely wrapped in their cloaks, entered the principal street just as the moon made a clear path for herself in the sky, and threw such a light as made them distinguish objects for the time almost as well as in broad day. The first person they met was no other than Oliver Dumps, armed with a bill, and wearing a face so woe-begone as was pitiful to look on.

“Well Oliver, what news?” enquired Master Combe.

“News!” exclaimed the constable in his dole-

fullest manner. "Prythee what news canst expect to hear at such a miserable time? As I am a Christian man, and a sinful, I am nigh worn out with melancholy. What a world is this! Alack, what will become of us? I see no end to the evil whereof this town is so full. We are all villainy—very villainy, as I am a Christian man."

"Why, what hath happened, good Oliver?" asked John Shakspeare.

"Wickedness hath happened," replied Oliver Damps; "the very shamefullest wickedness ever I came anigh. Well may we be visited by plagues. Our natures are vile. We run after iniquity as a curtail dog runs i' the wheel." Then, being further pressed by Master Combe to come to the point, he added, "First, there is Sir Nathaniel, who will not be moved to do any good office for the sick; and Master Buzzard, who, setteth his dogs at me, should I venture to ask of him to assist his poor neighbours. Then Stripes is ever getting of money from a parcel of ignorant, wretched folk, to conjure the pestilence away from their houses; added to which, no longer ago than scarce the half of an hour, I came upon Simon Lumpfish and Jonathan Swiggle, two of the town watch, in the kitchen of an empty dwelling, making use of a barrel of strong beer without any colour of warrant, by each laying of his length on the floor, and putting of his mouth to the bung-hole."

"They shall be looked to," observed Master Combe; "but come you with us, good Oliver, perchance we may need your assistance." Then, turning to one of the watch, who was stationed at a door-way, he enquired how things went in his ward.

"One hath died within this hour over at Peter Gimblet's, an' it please your worship," answered the man respectfully; "and there are two sick here at Dame Holloway's. They do say Morris Greenfinch be like to recover; and in some houses hereabouts, where the plague hath been, they have taken it so kindly that it hath scarce been felt."

After bidding of him keep strict watch, they continued their walk; and presently heard a voice of one calling across the way to his neighbour opposite.

"How goeth all with you?"

"We are all well, thanks be to God! neighbour Malmsey; and how fareth your bed-fellow?" replied one from a casement over against him.

"Bravely, neighbour Dowlas, I thank you," said his brother alderman; "they do say there is some show of the pestilence abating; I would it were true, else shall we be all ruined for a surety. I have not so much as sold a pint of wine for the last week past."

"Nor I a yard of cloth, for a month," added the other. "I pray God, the survivors may have the

decency to go into mourning for their lost relations."

"And so your good dame is well, neighbour?" asked Alderman Malmsey.

"As well as heart could wish," replied Alderman Dowlas.

"Commend me to her, I pray you," said the other; and then, with a "good night," each closed his casement. Upon proceeding a little further on, the party were stopped by the melodious sweet sound of several voices, intent upon the singing of some holy hymn. Perchance, it might have proceeded from some pious family; for in the quiet night, the ear could plainly enough distinguish the full deep bass of the father, joining with the clear sweet trebles of his wife and children. And exceeding touching it was at such a time to hear such proper singing; indeed, so moved were the three listeners, that they sought not to leave the spot till it was ended.

"That be David Hurdle's voice, I will be bound for it," exclaimed the Constable. "Indeed, it be well known he hath, during the raging of the pestilence, spent best part of the day in praying with his family, and in the singing of godly hymns. He is a poor man—some call him a Puritan, but I do believe him to be as honest good Christian man as any in this town, be they rich or poor, gentle or simple. But what villainous rude uproar is this,

my masters ! that treadeth so close on the heels of such exquisite music ?”

I’faith, Oliver Dumps had good cause to cry out as he did ; for all at once, they were startled by a number of most unmannerly voices, shouting in very boisterous fashion such profane words as these :—

“ If we boast not a fire,  
That is just our desire—  
What then ? We must needs burn the bellows ;  
And if here there’s a man  
That hath nought in his can—  
What then ? He’s the prince of good fellows.”

“ Odds, my life !” exclaimed a voice that was heard, amid the din of laughing and shouting, and other lewd behaviour. “ Odds, my life, that is as exquisite a catch as ever I heard. Methinks, ’tis the very movingest, mirthfullest a ———. What sayest Ticklebreech ?”

“ Exactly so, an’ it please your reverence,” replied the voice of the schoolmaster, in a tone somewhat husky.

“ By’r lady master parson,” said another, “ methinks ’tis of that superlative exquisiteness ’t would tickle — (a hiccup) the ribs of a tombstone.”

Master Combe, and his companions, peeped through the crevices of the shutters, and beheld Sir Nathaniel seated at the head of a table covered with drinking vessels, with Stripes opposite him,

and nigh upon a score of low idle disorderly vagabonds sitting round making merry, but with monstrous little assurance of sobriety in their looks.

“Lord! Lord! an’ these fellows be not heathens, I marvel what they shall rightly be called,” said the scandalized constable.

“It grieves me to see Sir Nathaniel so readily accommodate himself to such discreditable-ness,” observed John Shakspeare.

“’Slight!” exclaimed Master Combe, whose nature was vexed to behold such a scene with such actors in it; “he is a very hog, that will swill any wash that is given him, let it be where it may.”

The ringing of a large hand-bell now attracted their attention elsewhere; and looking along the street, they observed a cart slowly proceeding towards them, accompanied by two or three stout fellows, some carrying torches, and others armed with bills. It stopped at a house where was a red cross on the door, at which having knocked, and the door opening, two stepped in, and presently returned, bearing of a heavy burthen betwixt them, with the which they ascended a short ladder, and, without any word spoke, cast into the cart. Then, ringing of the bell again they continued their way, till some door opening noiselessly, they stopped, entered, and with the same dreadful silence carried out, what on nearer approach, proved to be a



corpse, which was added to the rest they had, in the manner that hath been described.

"Hast taken many this round?" asked Master Combe, of one of the watchmen walking in front of the horse.

"No, your worship, God be thanked," replied the man.

"Hast many more to take?" asked John Shakspeare.

"I expect not, master," said the other. "Indeed, from all I have witnessed and can get knowledge of, it seemeth to me the pestilence be abating wonderfully."

"God send it may come to a speedy ending," exclaimed Oliver Dumps, with some earnestness; "It maketh me clean out at heart when I think of what ravage it hath made."

The three now walked at the horse's head, conversing concerning of who had died, and who were sick, and the like matters, stopping when the cart stopped, and going on when it proceeded; but always keeping before the horse, because of the wind blowing from that direction. At one house, the men remained longer than was usual, and the door being open, there was heard a great cry of lamentation as of a woman in terrible affliction.

"Ah, poor dame, she hath infinite cause for such deep grieving," said the constable.

"Go get you hence!" cried one very urgently from within the house. "As God shall judge me, he shall not be touched."

"What meaneth this?" enquired John Shakspeare.

"I say it shall not be," continued the same voice. "I will die ere I will let him be borne away from me. Hast hearts? Hast feelings? Dost know of what stuff a mother's love be made? Away, villains!"

"'Tis a most pitiful story," observed Master Combe. "Wondrous pitiful! In sooth, she hath been sorely tried. But I must in, else in her desperation she will allow of nothing; and mayhap they may be violent with her."

"What wouldst do?" enquired John Shakspeare, catching his friend by the arm, as he was making for the door. "Surely, if there is one dead here, you will only be endangering of yourself by venturing in, and no good come of it to any."

"I pray you think not of it," cried Oliver Dumps, seeming in a famous consternation. "There hath more died in that house than in any two in the town."

"Fear nothing; I will be back anon," said Master Combe, as he broke away, and entered at the open door.

"Alack, think not of following him, I pray you, John Shakspeare!" called out the constable, in increased alarm, as he beheld the one quickly treading

upon the heels of the other. "Well, never saw I such wanton seeking of death. They be lost men. 'Twill be dangerous to be in their company after this; so I'll e'en have none on't." And away started he in the direction of his home. In the mean while the other two reached an inner chamber, where was a sight to see that would have melted any stone. On a low bed there sat a matronly woman, of decent appearance, with an aspect pale and exceeding careworn, and her eyes full of such thorough anguish as is utterly impossible to be described; and she held, folded in her arms, the body of a youth seeming to be dead of the pestilence.

"The last!" exclaimed she, in most moving tones, as she fixed her tearful gaze on the discoloured object in her lap. "Husband—children—all gone, despite my tender nursing, and constant hope this one might be spared, and now that—each followed the other, and here am I—woe is me!—widowed, childless, and heart-broken. Alack, 'tis a cruel world!" And thereupon she sobbed in such a sort as could not be seen of any with dry eyes.

"But they shall never take thee from me, my dear boy," continued she, in the like pitiful manner. "Heretofore I have borne all and flinched none; but thou hast been my last stay, whereon all the love I bore thy good father and thy brave brothers, was heaped together; and losing thee, I lose my

very heart and soul : so, quick or dead, I will cling to thee whilst I have life. Away ! insatiate wretches !” she cried, turning her mournful aspect upon the two men, “ Hast not had enough of me ? Dost not see how poor a case I am in for the lack of what I have been used to ? Begone !” And then she hugged the lifeless youth in her arms as if she would part with him on no account. Neither Master Combe or John Shakspeare felt as they were complete masters of themselves ; but they knew it could not be proper that the dead should stay with the living.

“ Believe me, we sympathise in your great afflictions with all our hearts, good dame,” at last observed the former to her, with that sweet courteousness which was so natural to him. “ But I pray you, have some pity on yourself, and be resigned to that which cannot be helped.”

“ Ah, Master Combe !” cried she, now first observing him, “ I would I could say I am glad to see you, for, in truth, you have been an excellent good friend to me and mine in our greatest need ; but as it seemeth to me my heart’s strings be so upon the stretch, ’twould be but a mockery to say so. Oh, the misery !” and then she bowed her head and wept exceedingly. At this Master Combe endeavoured all he could to give her comfort ; and as his speech was wonderfully to the purpose, though at first she was deaf to all argument of the sort, by degrees he won her to some shew of reason.

“ But he shall not be touched !” she exclaimed, mournfully, yet determinedly, “ who so proper to carry him out of the world as she who brought him in it ? I will have no rude hand laid on his delicate limbs. I will to the grave with him myself. Alack ! poor boy, how my heart aches to look at thee !” Then carefully wiping off the tears she had let fall upon his face, she proceeded to wrap him in a sheet, ever and anon giving of such deep sobs as shewed in what extremity she was in. This Master Combe sought not to interrupt ; and John Shakspeare’s honest nature was so moved at the scene, he had no mind to utter a word. Even the men, used as they must have been to sights of wretchedness, regarded not what was going on in total indifferency, as was manifest in their aspects. But the movingest sight of all was to see that hapless mother, when she had disposed of her dead son as decently as she could, bearing the heavy burthen in her arms with a slow step, looking pale as any ghost, and in such terrible despair as can never be conceived. The men, as they led the way with a lanthorn, were forced, more than once, to draw the cuffs of their jerkins over their eyelids ; and Master Combe and John Shakspeare followed her, full of pity for her sorrowful condition. She bore up bravely till she came to the door, when the sight of the dead cart, made visible by the red glare of the torches, came upon her with such a suddenness, that she

swooned away, and would have fallen on the ground, had not Master Combe ran quickly and caught her in his arms. Then, by his direction, her dead son was placed with the other corpses, and she carried back to the room she had left; and after seeing she had proper attendance, he and John Shakspeare proceeded with the watchmen and others that had the care of the cart, calling no where else as they went, in so doleful a humour that they spoke never a word all the way. They came to a field outside of the town where was a great hole dug, and a large mound of fresh earth at the side of it. At this time, some of the men took in their hands mattocks which were stuck in the soil, others backed the cart so that the end of it should come as nigh as possible to the pit, and the rest held torches that the others might see the better. Scarce any spoke save Master Combe, who, in a low tone, gave such orders as were needed. Presently the cart was tilted, and in the next moment the bodies of those dead of the pestilence swept into the rude grave prepared for them.

“By God’s body, I heard a groan!” cried John Shakspeare, with a famous vehemence. In an instant there was so dead a silence you might have heard a pin drop. What had been said was true enough, for ere another minute had elapsed, all there distinctly heard a sound of groaning come from the pit. Each of the men looked at his neigh-

bour in silent terror, and speedily as they might, brought their torches to throw as much light as they could into the pit's mouth.

"Alack ! I fear we have buried the living with the dead !" exclaimed Master Combe, evidently in a monstrous perplexity. Every eye was strained to note if any sign of life was visible amongst the mass below. What a sight was there presented to the horror-struck gazers ! Arms and legs and upturned faces that had burst from their frail coverings, all discoloured and ghastly, looking more hideous than can be conceived.

"As I live, something moveth in this corner !" cried John Shakspeare.

"A light here, ho !" shouted Master Combe in a voice that brought every torch to the spot ere the words had scarce been uttered ; and all were breathless with expectation. To the extreme consternation of every one there, Master Combe suddenly seized a torch out of the hands of one of the watch who was nighest to him, and leaped in amongst those foul bodies close upon the spot pointed out by John Shakspeare.

"Help all, if ye be Christian men !" cried Master Combe, as if he was exceeding moved, whilst those above were gazing down upon him, bewildered with very fear. "Help, I pray you ! for here is the widow's son alive yet, and if care be used without loss of time, perchance we shall have

such good fortune as to restore him to her to be her comfort all her days."

Methinks there needs no telling of what alacrity was used to get the youth out of the pit with all speed, every one forgetting of his danger in the excitement of the case. Suffice it to say he was rescued from his expected grave before he had any consciousness of being there, and that such treatment was used as soon turned to his profit; for he recovered, and grew to be hale soon. Of the infinite joy of the late bereaved mother when that her dead son was restored alive to her loving arms, shall I not attempt to describe, for to my thinking, it is beyond the extremest cunning of the pen.



## CHAPTER V.

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee ;  
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

GREENE.

O flatterer false, thou traitor born,  
What mischief more might thou devise  
Than thy dear friend to have in scorn  
And him to wound in sundry wise ?  
Which still a friend pretends to be,  
And art not so by proof I see.

Fie, fie upon such treachery !

WILLIAM HUNNIS. (*Paradise of Daintie Devises.*)

Who will not judge him worthy to be robbed  
That sets his doors wide open to a thief,  
And shews the felon where his treasure lies ?

BEN JONSON. (*Every Man in his Humour.*)

TIME passed, and with it passed away all sign of the dreadful scourge that had fallen so heavily on the good town of Stratford. So out of mind was it, that the honest burgesses scarce ever talked of the subject, save peradventure some long winter's eve, when tales were going round the chimney corner, some one or another would vary the common gossiping of ghosts and witches, fairies and such like, with a story of the fearful plague, the which never failed to make the hearers, ere they entered their beds, down on their marrow-bones, and very heartily thank God they had escaped such imminent terrible

danger. Every thing was going on just in the old pleasant way.

John Shakspeare had been made an alderman of, and was now advanced to the dignity of high bailiff, being also in a fair way of business, and in excellent repute, for his thorough honesty, among his fellow burgesses; nor was it forgotten of them the good part he played with Master Combe in the time of the pestilence. Of these, neither had suffered by the manifold dangers in which they had oft ventured; nor had Dame Shakspeare, or her family either, notwithstanding of the fright she had been put to. As for her sweet son William, he grew to be as handsome and well behaved a child as ever lived in the world, and the admiration of all who could get sight of him. Concerning of his intelligence above all other children that ever lived, nurse Cicely gave such marvellous accounts, that he must needs have been a prodigy ere he was in short coats. Be this as it may, there can be no manner of doubt he gave, at an exceeding early age, many signs of excellence, and of aptitude for such learning as the inquisitive young mind is ever most intent upon.

Once when John Shakspeare, with Humphrey and others who assisted him in his business, were labouring hard in weighing and sorting and packing certain tods of wool, the good dame was in her chamber seated, plying of her needle famously, and on the floor just at her feet was her young son,

having by him certain toys such as children commonly find some pretty pastime in. Sometimes he would seem monstrous busy diverting of himself with these trifles, prattling to himself all the whilst; anon he would leave off, and lifting up his face, would ask some question of his mother, the which if she answered not, be sure he would importune her with infinite earnestness till she did. Close at hand there was a spinning-wheel; on the wainscot were two or three samplers, containing divers fine texts of scripture, with flowers worked round the border, doubtless of the good dame's own working. On a square table of oak was a basket with threads and tapes and the like in it; beside it was some cloth of a frolic green, of which she appeared to be making a new frock for the boy, with such pretty fantasy of hers in the fashioning of it, as she thought would become him most. The casement, which looked out into the garden, being unclosed, there was upon the ledge a large ewer filled with sprigs of lavender, that made the chamber smell very daintily. Nurse Cicely was assisting of Maud in a further room, the door of which being open, the two could be seen at their employment, getting up the linen of the family—for nurse had grown greatly in her mistress' confidence, because of her constant affectionateness and care of the child, and of her trustworthiness and wonderful skill in all household matters.

"Mother, I pray you tell me something concerning of the fairies of whom Nurse Cicely discourseth to me so oft!" exclaimed the boy.

"Prythee, wait till nurse hath leisure," replied his mother. "She knoweth more of them than do I."

"An' you love me, tell me are they so mindful of good little children as she hath said?" added he more urgently.

"Indeed, I have heard so," answered the dame.

"I marvel where they shall find lodging, be they of such small stature?" observed the child.

"It is said they do commonly sojourn in the cups of the sweetest flowers," said she; "hiding themselves all the day therein, in the deepest retreats of woods and lonely places; and in the night time come they out in some green field, or other verdant space, and dance merrily of a summer's eve, with such delicate sweet enjoyment as is unknown to mortals, till the morning star appeareth in the skies, when away hie they to their hiding-places, every one as swiftly as if he had wings to carry him." The boy listened with his fair eyes upturned, gazing in his mother's face in a famous seriousness and wonder, then seemed he to ponder awhile on what had been told him.

"And how may little children be possessed of such goodness as may make them be well regarded of these same fairies?" asked he at last.

“ They must give way to no naughty behaviour,” answered his mother. “ They must not be uncivil, nor froward, nor capable of any kind of disobedience or obstinacy, nor say anything that is not true, nor be impatient, or greedy, or quarrelsome, nor have any uncleanly or untidy ways, nor do any one thing they are told not.”

“ I warrant you I will do none of these,” exclaimed the boy.

“ But above all they must be sure learn their letters betimes,” continued the other; “ that they may be able to know the proper knowledge writ in books, which if they know not when they grow up, neither fairy nor any other shall esteem them to be of any goodness whatsoever.”

“ I warrant you I will learn my letters as speedily as I can,” replied the child eagerly. “ Nay, I beseech you, mother, teach them to me now, for I am exceeding desirous to be thought of some goodness.” The mother smiled, well pleased to notice such impatience in him, and bade him leave his toys and fetch her a horn-book that was on a shelf with a few books of another kind, the which he did very readily; and then as he stood leaning on her lap, seriously intent upon observing of the characters there put down, she told him of what names they were called, and bade him mark them well, that he might be sure not to mistake one for another. This very willingly he promised to do, and for some

time, the whilst she continued her work, yet with a frequent and loving eye on his proceedings, he would pore over those letters, saying to himself what their names were, or if he stood in any doubt, straightway questioning of his mother upon the matter.

“But what good are these same letters of, mother?” enquired he all at once.

“This much,” replied Dame Shakspeare, “by knowing of them thoroughly one by one, you shall soon come to be able to put them together for the forming of words; and when you are sufficiently apt at that, you shall thereby come to be learned enough to read all such words as are in any sentence—which you shall find to be made up of such; and when the reading of these sentences be familiar to you, doubt not your ability to master whatsoever proper book falleth into your hand—for all books are composed of such sentences.”

“Is it so, indeed!” observed the boy in a pretty sort of innocent surprise. “And do any of these goodly books discourse of the fairies you spoke of awhile since?”

“Ah, that do they, and famously I warrant you,” answered his mother.

“Oh! how glad of heart shall I be when I can master such books!” exclaimed the child very earnestly; “for I do long to learn more of these fairies. Dost know, mother, that after nurse hath

sung me songs of them, or told me marvellous pretty tales of them, as is her wont till I have fallen asleep, it hath seemed to me as if crowds of such tiny folk out of all number, shining so brightly in their gay apparel of the finest colours, as though I was with them in the fair sunshine, have come thronging to me, offering me this dainty nice thing and the other dainty nice thing, and singing to me sweeter songs than nurse Cicely sings, and dancing and making sport with such infinite joy as would make any glad to be of their company; and whilst they continue, they shew me such wonderful great kindness, and afford me such extreme pleasure, it grieveth me when I wake to find they are all gone. So that I am exceeding desirous, as I have said, to make myself as good as I can, and to learn my letters as speedily as I may, that I may be admitted to play with them, and be loved of them as much as they will let me."

The good dame marvelled somewhat to hear this, and to note with what pleased excitement it was said, for sooth to say, it was a right pleasant picture as ever limner drew, to see those intelligent eyes so full of deep expressiveness, and the fair forehead surrounded with its clustering shining curls, and the delicate rosy cheek and smiling mouth, that could of themselves have discoursed most exquisite meaning, even though that most melodious voice had failed in its proper office.

"Marry, but you have pleasant dreams, methinks!" exclaimed she at last.

"Ay, that have I," replied the boy; "yet I like not waking, and all this sweet pleasantness go away, I know not where. But I must to my lesson of the letters," added he, as he took to his horn-book again; "else shall the fairies take me to be of no manner of goodness, and straightway have none of me."

"Yes, an' it please you, mistress is within. I pray you enter," nurse Cicely was here heard to say in the next chamber—"I doubt not she will be exceeding glad of your company; so walk in, I beseech you. Here is Mistress Alderman Dowlas, an' it please you, mistress!" exclaimed she, entering the chamber, closely followed by the draper's wife, looking very cheerful, and dressed in a scarlet cloak and hat, with a basket in her hand and her purse at her girdle, as though she were going to marketing.

"Ha, gossip, how farest?" enquired the visitor, making up to her host, with a merry tripping pace.

"Bravely, neighbour, I thank you heartily," replied she, and then they two kissed each other affectionately, and nurse Cicely got a chair, and having wiped the seat with her apron, sat it down close to her mistress.

"And how's the dear boy? Come hither, you pretty rogue, I would have a kiss of you!" exclaimed the alderman's wife, as she sat herself at her ease,



and gave the basket for nurse to place on the table.

"An' it please you, I am learning of my letters," said the child, shrinking closer to his mother's side.

"Nay, by my troth, this is somewhat uncivil of you!" cried the dame, though she laughed merrily all the time. "But I doubt you will use a woman so when you get to be a man."

"He will have none of his father in him an' he do," observed nurse, "for he had the wit to win one of the very comeliest women all the country round."

"La, nurse, how idly you talk!" exclaimed Dame Shakspeare, then bending her head to her young son to hide a slight blush that appeared on her fair cheeks, she said to him—"Go you to neighbour Dowlas like a good boy, I pray you."

"Ha, come hither straight, and mayhap I shall find you some keepsake ere we part," added her neighbour. The child moved slowly towards her, with his eyes steadfastly regarding of his horn-book, till she raised him on her knee and caressed him; and yet he was as intent on the letters as ever.

"And what hast got here, I prythee, that thou art so earnest about?" asked Mistress Dowlas, as she examined what he had in his hand. "A horn-book, as I live! and dost really know thy letters at so early an age?"

"By'r Lady, of all children ever I met, he exceedeth them in aptness at any sort of learning,"

cried nurse Cicely, putting of his frock straight because of its appearing somewhat rumpled; "as I live, I never heard of his fellow: wilt believe it, mistress?—if by chance I sing him a ballad—the which he is ever a calling of me to do, he will have it again and again; and, perchance, ere the day is over, he will be playing with his toys and singing of that very ballad all the whilst!"

"Oh, the dear boy!" exclaimed the draper's pretty wife, as she cuddled him closer in her arms, the mother looking on with a famous satisfaction in her features; "and canst tell me those pretty letters?" enquired she of him.

"Nay, I doubt I can tell you them all," replied the child ingenuously; "but methinks I know a good many of them." Then pointing with his finger on the several characters as he named them, he continued—"first here is A, that ever standeth astraddle;—next him is B, who is all head and body and no legs;—then cometh C, bulged out behind like a very hunchback;—after him D, who doeth the clean contrary, for his bigness is all before;—next," here he hesitated for some few seconds, the others present regarding him with exceeding attentiveness and pleasure—"next here is—alack, I have forgotten of what name this one is called: mother, I pray you tell me again!" It was told him presently. Then went he on as before, with great seriousness naming of the letters with some few mistakes, in most of

which he quickly corrected himself, and coming to a halt when he was in any doubt of the matter—which ended in his asking help of his mother—none interrupting him till he came to the last of them.

“There is a scholar for you!” cried nurse Cicely in an ecstasy of admiration; “saw any such wonderful cleverness? O, my Christian conscience, I am amazed at beholding of such a marvel! Well, an’ he come not to be some famous learned clerk I shall be hugely disappointed.”

“Dear heart, how I love thee!” exclaimed Mistress Dowlas, kissing of him with an earnest shew of affection; “nurse, prythee give me the basket; I have got him there a delicate piece of march-pane, which I doubt not will give him infinite content; and here in my purse I have got a bran new silver groat fresh from the mint, which he shall have of me as a keepsake.”

“Marry, what a prodigal goodness!” cried nurse, as she did what was required of her without loss of time; “but he meriteth it well, he doth, I will be bound for him, and every good thing in this world that might grace his having.”

“What say you to neighbour Dowlas for her great kindness?” enquired the much delighted mother, as her young son took in his hands her visitor’s gifts.

“I thank you right heartily, neighbour Dowlas,” replied he, lifting up his fair eyes with such modesty

and gratefulness expressed in them, as charmed her heart to see.

“ I’faith, should I be inclined to become covetous, methinks here I should find ample excuse for it,” observed the draper’s wife, patting of the child’s rosy cheeks as she put him down from her lap : then rising, added, “ But now I must hie me home as speedily as I may for the getting of dinner ready, for indeed I have tarried so long a space since my coming out, that perchance my good master shall give me up altogether.”

The draper’s wife having gossipped all she had to say concerning of her neighbours and their doings, kissed the boy and his mother very lovingly, and took her leave.

Now the reader hath already had some acquaintance with those worthies, Master Alderman Dowlas and Master Alderman Malmsey, but methinks ’tis high time he should know more of them for the better understanding of this story. Both had been married some time to two as proper women as ever were seen. The former of the two was a rigid, serious, methodical fellow to all outward appearance ; somewhat tall and slender, with hard solemn features, as hath been described ; and the other was one of a right jolly face and portly person, with a merry dark eye, ever a winking at some pretty woman or another, and a short black beard, with hair of a like colour. Each was turned of forty,

and therefore ought to have been of discreet behaviour; and as for their wives, if ever men had inducement to honest conduct, they had in possessing of such women; for they were ever of an admirable pleasant humour, of notable excellence in what in woman ought to be, and in all respects such good wives, that it was not possible to say ought to their discredit. Each was a little short of thirty, and having had no children, had not yet parted with their youthfulness, and the innocent happy carelessness which is so oft its companion. They were friends from girls, and loved each other as though they were sisters.

“Neighbour Dowlas!” cried a well-known voice, as the draper’s wife was crossing to her house; and looking up, she saw her gossip Mistress Alderman Malmsey leaning out of her casement. “I pray you come in a while, I have a matter of some moment for your private ear.”

“I’ll come to you this very instant,” answered the other, and straightway passed into the vintner’s dwelling. Scarce had she got within the threshold, when the jolly vintner bustled up to her with a marvellous obsequious courtesy welcoming her to the house, pressing her to taste of his best wine, and leering in her face the whilst, whispering all sorts of sugared compliments in her ear.

“Nay, prythee, let me go!” exclaimed she, striving to free her hand, which he held in his as

they stood at the bottom of the stair. "You hurt my fingers, you vile wretch, with your intolerable squeezing."

"Oh, delectable Mistress Dowlas!" cried he, kissing of her hand in a seeming rapture; "the stars are but pitiful rushlights to those exquisite bright eyes, and that delicate fair cheek out-rivalleth the peach's richest bloom."

"Away with you, and your poor flattering stuff!" said the draper's pretty wife, still striving to break away from him; "I'm not to be cozened so easily, I promise you."

"I beseech you, dearest life, allow me one sweet salute!" whispered he, in most entreating tones, as he brought his face as close as he could to her's.

"There's one, prythee, make the most on't!" exclaimed she, as she took him a box on the ear that made the place ring; and then ran laughing up stairs.

Neighbour Malmsey wore a more serious face than was her wont. At least, so thought neighbour Dowlas, as she entered her chamber; and after the customary courtesies were over, and the two were seated close together, neighbour Malmsey looked more serious still.

"I have a matter to speak of, that maketh me exceeding dull at heart," commenced Mistress Malmsey.

"Doubtless, 'tis concerning the improper behaviour of her wretch of a husband," thought Mistress Dowlas; then added aloud, "Believe me, I am infinitely concerned also."

"I hope you will not think the worse of me for telling you," continued the vintner's wife; "but I assure you, rather than allow of your being unhappy by knowing it, I have for many years past endured much of unpleasantness at his hands, and said nought but rebuke him for his wantonness."

"Alack, we cannot all have good husbands!" exclaimed her gossip, in a consolatory sort of manner. "Now, my Jonathan ——"

"But he only groweth the bolder for my forbearance," continued neighbour Malmsey, interrupting of the other. "Indeed, he getteth to be quite abominable, and must have a speedy check put to his misdeeds, or his wickedness will soon make such a head, there will be no putting of him down."

"O' my life, I cannot count him so bad as that," observed neighbour Dowlas, as if, with a view of affording the ill-used wife some comfort. "Perchance, it is only a little wildness that good counsel will make him ashamed of speedily. Now, my Jonathan ——"

"I am glad you think no worse of him," quickly answered the vintner's wife; "but methinks, it looketh to be a very shameful impudency in him to go on so, and have so good a wife."

“ Ay, ’tis monstrous that, of a surety !” cried her gossip.

“ But I have done with him,” added neighbour Malmsey, with some earnestness ; “ he hath lost my good opinion long since. I will forswear his company, an’ he mend not soon.”

“ Prythee, take not to such extreme measures !” said the other, concernedly. “ Finding no profit in it, I doubt not he will alter his way, and I will take good heed he shall do you no manner of dishonesty.”

“ Marry, *I* can answer for that,” observed her companion ; “ but I do assure you I have talked to him many times of the heinousness of his offence, and never at any time have given him the slightest provocation for such notorious misbehaving to you.”

“ Of that I feel well assured,” answered neighbour Dowlas ; “ and if at last he do not love you as fondly as ever man loved his wife, I shall be hugely mistaken.”

“ Eh ? What ? Love *me* ?” exclaimed her companion, looking in a famous wonder. “ But I marvel you should make a jest of it. I would not in such a case I promise you ; but it glads me infinitely to say there is no fear of such a thing. My Timothy giveth me no sort of uneasiness.”

“ Indeed !” cried her neighbour, seeming in a greater amazement than the other had been.



"I would your husband would take a pattern of him."

"I would nought of the kind, neighbour Malmsey," quickly ejaculated the draper's wife, with a very absolute earnestness. "I like not my husband to be ever a running after another man's wife, seeking of unlawful favours of her, as for years past Master Malmsey hath done to me, I promise you."

"My Timothy run after *you*, neighbour Dowlas!" screamed out the vintner's wife, bounding from her seat in as absolute astonishment as ever was seen.

"By my troth, yes," answered her companion.

"Oh, the horrid villain!" exclaimed the other.

"He is ever pestering of me with his foolish flatteries and protestations of love, and the like poor stuff," added the draper's wife. "I have no rest from him when I have such ill-hap as to be in his company. Nay, as I came in here he would needs have a kiss of me at the stair-foot, but I up with my hand and gave him so rude a salute on the ear, I doubt not I have taken all conceit of such favours out of his head."

"Oh, the abominable caitiff!" cried neighbour Malmsey.

"I liked not telling you of it, thinking it might vex you," continued the other, "so I bore it as good-humoredly as I could, and should not have spoke of it now had you not begun the subject upon my entering of the room."

“’Twas of Master Dowlas’s shameful behaviour to me I was speaking,” said the vintner’s wife. “He hath followed me up and down for years in this way, spite of all I could say or do.”

“What, my Jonathan!” now cried the other, starting from her chair in a greater to do than her companion had been. “The absolute wretch! But I will be even with him, I warrant you. Please you, neighbour Malmsey, to leave the revenging of the wrong done us by these pitiful hypocrites; it shall be done after such a sort as shall punish them handsomely for their intended villainy, and in remembrance of it keep them from all such baseness for the future.”

“That will I, and willingly, gossip,” answered her companion with the tears in her eyes. “But he hath oft pressed me to give him a private meeting, prythee, say what I had best do.”

“I have a merry cousin of mine, who will help us in this purpose of ours,” replied Neighbour Dowlas. “So you must e’en invite him to sup with you alone at Widow Pippins’. I will do the same with my worshipful gallant, and if you learn your part of me, we will have as exquisite sport as ever misused woman had of a vile husband.”

“Rely on me,” said Neighbour Malmsey. “But, as I live, I hear the voice of your precious partner talking to mine on the stair-foot!” exclaimed she.

“Doubtless they will both make for here, so do

you as I have said, and leave the rest to my managing," added the other. She had scarce said the words, and they had reseated themselves, when, as they appeared intent upon some deep discourse, there entered Master Alderman Dowlas, with his usual great soberness of manner, having his brother alderman behind him in a rare jesting humour, as he seemed, as if quite forgetful of the box of the ear he had just had.

"Perdie! here is one about to send the town crier after you, fair Mistress Dowlas!" exclaimed he, making up to her as gallantly as ever.

"Indeed, I have marvelled hugely on account of your long stay abroad, knowing not how you had disposed of yourself," said the draper. "But I am wonderfully content to find you in such admirable company. And how doth my fair life?" whispered he, glancing at his friend's wife most enamouredly, as he followed her to a distant part of the chamber, and vowing and entreating and flattering of her, as though it were done for a very wager. Nor was Master Malmsey in any way behind him in such ill-doing, as may be supposed, for he sat down with his back to the other, before Mistress Dowlas, exercising of his tongue with the movingest expressions he could think of, and gazing at her comeliness as though it were the rarest feast for the eye that the whole world contained. Neither thought of glancing towards where was his wife. Indeed, each was too

intent on what he was about to heed what the other was a doing, not imagining such a thing as his friend attempting of the same thing as he was himself straining might and main to accomplish. Howsoever, in the space of a few moments this private talk was broke up, manifestly to the exceeding contentation of these worthless husbands.

“What an absolute fool is Neighbour Malmsey, that he looketh not closer after his wife!” thought Master Alderman Dowlas, as he descended the stair, looking as solemn as an owl.

“What a very ass is Neighbour Dowlas, that he cannot see that I am making love to his wife before his face!” thought the vintner, with an inward chuckle of satisfaction at his own cleverness and better fortune.

All that day the draper appeared in a most exquisite satisfaction with himself. The seriousness of his aspect was oft disturbed with a happy smile, and as the noon wore out, he kept ever asking of the hour.

“Dame,” said he at last, after he had spent a wonderful time in washing, and decking himself out in his best apparel, till he looked as spruce and stiff as a roll of buckram; “there is a certain godly man over at Hillsborough, that I have promised Neighbour Hurdle to go and hear preach this night; if, peradventure, I should tarry long,

prythee, get thee to bed betimes. I am loath thy rest should be shortened by waiting up for me."

"Marry! I should like to go myself to hear the good man," observed his wife, somewhat mischievously by the way, "for methinks his preaching cannot help being as good for me as for you."

"But the distance is far too great for thy walking, dame, else shouldst thou without fail," replied he very readily.

"Nay, but I walked to Barston last Shrovetide, which is a good mile longer," said she. "I doubt not such a journey will do me an especial good service, to say nought of the godliness of it."

"Indeed, I would take thee with all my heart," added her husband, "but since the last rains some parts of the road are utterly impassable for huge deep ponds that go right across."

"Then will we borrow John a Combe's grey horse, and I will ride behind you on a pillion," answered his wife, as if desirous of bringing him to a nonplus.

"O' my life! I cannot wait to go a borrowing now, so I must e'en wish thee good bye, and take thee another time," replied Master Dowlas; and then, as if fearful she would more strongly desire to go, as quick as he might he took himself straight out of the house. Scarce had he entered the street when he was hailed by his jolly neighbour oppo-

site, standing at his door in his Sunday jerkin and new gallygaskins, as finely trussed as ever he was when a good score years younger. To his question where was he going so fine, the draper answered as he had told his wife, then Master Malmsey declared to the other that as his good dame had gone a visiting to her aunt's, he intended making a night on't with a few choice spirits at his cousin Birch's. Thus each were deceived, and each laughed in his sleeve at the other's credulity.

Jonathan Dowlas proceeded on his way, hugging himself in his own conceit at the pass he had brought matters to with the buxom Mistress Malmsey, till he came to the outskirts of the town, where was a small inn known as "The Rose," kept by the widow Pippins, in famous repute for her careless free humour, and fondness for jests of all sorts. The building, or buildings, for there seemed more than one, were connected by a wooden gallery that run across right in front of the yard, on one side of which lay the more respectable portion of the tenement, with its boarded front covered with grapes, that hung in famous clusters even up to the thatch. The other part looked to be the stables, pigsties, and the like sort of places. Jonathan made for the entrance, holding up his head as high as he might.

"Ha, ha! Master Alderman, ar't there!" exclaimed a voice from the gallery, and looking up,

the draper's eye caught sight of the widow Pippins. There was she leaning on her elbows over the railing, as if watching for him, her brown face crinkling up on her red arms, like a rasher of bacon on the burning coals. Perchance she might be laughing, but Jonathan Dowlas was not nigh enough to see very distinctly. "Get thee in quick, I prythee, and I will be with thee straight."

The alderman obeyed her bidding with a stately alacrity, and he had scarce got fairly housed when he was met by mine hostess, whose still bright eyes, albeit though she was a woman somewhat advanced in years, twinkled with a most merry maliciousness.

"Follow me," whispered she, evidently striving to suppress a laugh, and then giving him a sly nudge and a wink, added, "Oh, thou villain!" led the way to a chamber, of the which she had scarce closed the door, when she burst out into a long loud laugh, the draper looking on as though he knew not what to make of it. "By my fay, now who would have thought of this!" exclaimed she, holding of her sides, and looking at him with exceeding, yet with a monstrous ludicrous intentness. "Where didst get the powder to make so exquisite fair a woman so infinitely in love with thee as is Mistress Malmsey?" The alderman relaxed somewhat in the seriousness of his aspect at hearing this intelligence. "She dotes on the very ground thou dost walk on!" continued she, and the alderman smiled

outright. "But who would have suspected this of one so serious as thou art? O' my womanhood! what a very rogue thou art!" saying which she fetched Master Dowlas so sore a thump on the back, that it went some way towards the knocking of him off his legs.

"Poor Master Malmsey!" cried she, as plainly as she could in the midst of her laughing, "Alack! he hath no suspicion of his wife's huge fondness for thee, I'll be bound for't. Knowing of thy notable gravity, he cannot have the slightest colour of jealousy. But, I charge thee, use her with a proper handsomeness. She is none of your light madams—she hath a most gentle spirit, and is the very delicatest, sweetest creature I ever came anigh." Then fixing on him a look in which seriousness and mirth seemed striving for the mastery, she cried, "Go to, for a sly fox!" and hitting of him just such another thump as she gave him a moment since,—with a fresh burst of laughter—she left him to himself.

Jonathan found that he was in a long narrow chamber, strewed with rushes, with a door at each end, and one at the side, at which he had entered—having in the middle a small table set out for supper, with a larger one at the further end of the chamber, completely covered with a cloth that fell down to the ground on all sides of it, and it was fairly hung



round with arras, somewhat the worse for its antiquity, for it gaped in some places sadly. He had hardly noticed these things when the door at the bottom of the room opened, and there entered Mistress Malmsey, clad in her very gayest attire, and looking, as the alderman thought, more blooming than ever he had seen her. He, with an exceeding formal sort of gallantry, hastened to get a chair for her, expressing of his extreme rapture at her goodness in giving him this appointment, and then sat himself down as close to her as he could, taking her hand very lovingly in his, and commencing his famous fine compliments, protestations, and entreaties, with an earnestness that he imagined was sure of prevailing with any woman. The vintner's wife answered with some coyness, that convinced him what the widow Pippins had said was true enough, and he straightway redoubled his exertions, fully assured his success with her was beyond all doubting.

“Divinest creature!” exclaimed the enamoured draper, looking at his companion as lack-a-daisical as a hooked gudgeon, “fairest, sweetest, superfinest she alive! I do assure thee my affections be of the best nap, and will wear in all weathers; and I will give thee such liberal measure of my love as shall make thee infinitely loath to have dealings elsewhere.”

“ Alack, men are such deceivers !” cried Mistress Malmsey. “ They soon depart from what they promise.”

“ Count me not as such, I pr’ythee,” replied the alderman, “ I am warranted fast. I do assure thee, I am none of such poor fabrics—I am of the finest quality, even to the fag end. Oh, exquisitest Mistress Malmsey, an’ you do not take pity on me straight, I must needs lie on the shelf like a considerable remnant, of which the fashion hath gone out of date.”

“ Hush ! as I live, there is my husband’s voice !” here exclaimed the vintner’s wife, to the great alarm of her lover, and both started up together, seeming in a wonderful surprise and affright.

“ What ho ! house here !” shouted Master Alderman Malmsey, from the stair foot.

“ Hide thee, good Master Dowlas, or I am lost,” exclaimed the vintner’s wife, and before Jonathan could look about him, she had vanished out of the bottom door ; but he was not allowed time to think what he should do in such a dilemma, for he heard the footsteps of his neighbour close upon the door, so, as speedily as he could, he crept under the table at the further end of the room, imagining that the other was merely paying of a passing visit, as he was proceeding to his cousin Birch’s, and would tarry but a short time. Here he lay snugly ensconced, not daring to peep out for fear he should

be seen. Presently, in came the jolly vintner, humming of a tune, and bandying jests with the Widow Pippins, who led the way with a light—it getting to be nigh upon dark—and, by her loud laughing, was in as fine a humour at beholding him in her house, as she had before been at seeing his neighbour.

“Odds pittikins, what a jest!” cried the merry widow, putting the light upon the supper table. “Happy man!” added she, looking on him as seriously as she could, and then giving him a sly poke on the ribs, exclaimed, as plain as her loud laughing would allow, “But what a monstrous poor fool is her husband!” At which saying of hers Master Malmsey joined in the laugh right earnestly.

“There is never such an ass in Stratford,” said he, when his mirth would allow him words. “He is so weak of conceit in the matter that he will allow of my making love to his wife before his eyes. But mum, widow—mum’s the word,” said he, mysteriously, “I should not like of his knowing what kindness I am doing him. Mayhap he would take it somewhat uncivil of me. So be close, widow, I prythee.”

“As a fox,” replied the other, knowingly.

“Dost not think, a man who taketh no better heed of his wife, ought to be so served?” enquired the vintner.

“O’ my troth, yes!” answered the widow, break-

ing out into a fresh peal of laughter; "and trust me, I would think it good sport to help make a fool of him."

"I thank thee exceedingly," said Master Malmsey.

"Nay, thou hast small cause of thanks, believe me, Master Alderman," replied his merry companion, with the tears running down her cheeks from sheer mirth; "I do it out of good will—out of good will, I do assure thee." Then nudging him o' the elbow, having an exceeding sly look with her, she added, "Art thou not a rogue. now—an especial rogue—a very cozening rogue, to make the flower of all Stratford to be so taken with thee?"

"It cometh entirely of her fool of a husband," answered the vintner, chuckling mightily. "He would allow of our being together at all times, and was ever thrusting of her, as it were, into my arms. How could I help myself. I am but a man, and she so exquisite sweet a creature! So, whilst he was humming and hawing to my good dame, I had her up in a corner, making of love to her by the hour together."

"Fie on thee, Master Alderman!" said she, shaking her head as if with a famous seriousness. "Thou art a dangerous man for any poor woman to be with, so I will e'en be quit of thy company. I'faith thou art a sad rogue." Then fetching him a poke i' the ribs that made him gasp for breath,

she hurried out of the room, laughing more heartily than ever.

All this made Jonathan Dowlas prick up his ears, and he marvelled hugely who could be the frail wife his neighbour was enamoured of, as he had had no suspicion of such a thing; whereof the knowledge of it he had now gained, made him think his designs on Mistress Malmsey a proper punishment for his brother alderman's unpardonable conduct towards his friend, whoever he might be. Full of all sorts of speculations on the matter, he remained in his hiding place without moving, for he could hear the vintner humming of a tune, and walking to and fro, and was cautious his hiding place might not be discovered. Presently the door opened and some one entered, whom Master Malmsey addressed in such a manner as made Jonathan feel assured it was the very woman the other declared he so loved. She answered in so small a voice she could not be well heard in the draper's hiding place; and, in a minute after, the two seated themselves at the farther end of the room, where, although he heard each word his neighbour spoke, because of the greater loudness of his speech, of his companion distinguished he never a word, it seemed to be uttered in such a whisper. The extreme movingness of the vintner's speech at last filled his neighbour with so absolute a curiousness to know who it was the other was so intent upon loving, that he began, with wonderful

cautiousness, to lift up a part of the table cover, so that he might take a peep without beeing seen.

The first thing he got sight of was neighbour Malmsey, kneeling on one knee with his hand to his heart, with nothing but the most desperate and uncontrollable affection in his looks, and such an absolute irresistableness in his speech, that it was as if no woman must stand against it. Before him was seated a female very prettily attired, whose face being somewhat in the shade, and a little turned from him, Master Dowlas could not at all make out. The candle wanted snuffing abominably, or perchance he would have seen better.

“Prythee turn not away those lustrous eyes,” exclaimed the vintner in a rare impassioned manner; “the poor knave thy husband heedeth not their brightness; and that most delicious lip, that rivalleth my choicest wines in the tempting richness of its hue,—why should such a sorry fellow as he is have its flavour to himself, who manifestly careth not for it. All my heart longeth but for a taste. My dear sweet, prythee allow it but this once. I will be bound to thee ever after. I will hold thee in more regard than my chieftest customer. Come, we dally with opportunity. I will be bold and steal it an’ thou wilt not give after so much asking.” Just at this moment the speaker made an effort as if to salute his companion, and she moving at the same time brought her full face to the light, and

Jonathan Dowlas beheld his own wife. A clap of thunder would not have startled him more than such a discovery; indeed so monstrous was he moved at it that he clean forgot where he was, and rising quickly hit himself so sore a crack o' the crown against the table, that he could do nought for some minutes after but rub his pate and vow vengeance against his false wife and wicked treacherous neighbour.

“By'r Lady now, I *must* go up,” cried Mistress Malmsey from below, so loud that all heard her.

“O' my troth, here is your wife coming, and if she catch us I shall be undone!” exclaimed Mistress Dowlas, immediately after which the unhappy draper heard the shuffling of feet, and he was left in darkness.

“Now if his wife come here I will have excellent revenge,” thought he. Presently he heard a door open, and some one cry out in a whisper—“Master Alderman!” whereupon he stealthily left his hiding place.

“Hist!” cried he, fumbling his way on tiptoe across the room.

“Hist!” replied some one else, evidently making towards him with as little noise as possible.

“Prythee where art, my honey sweet?” enquired the former; “since thy departure here hath been that most wretched villain, thy husband, seeking to do me most monstrous wickedness with my wife;

but if I pay him not handsomely there is no smoothness in velvet. Come hither quick, my dear life, for I am impatient to have thee in my most fond embrace !”

“Ha, indeed !” cried Master Malmsey, who had hid himself behind the arras when his fair companion had ran off with the light, and hearing a voice cry “Master Alderman,” crept out thinking she had returned to him. “Take that and be hanged to thee !” whereupon he made a blow ; but being in the dark he hit nothing.

“Villain, art there !” exclaimed Master Dowlas in as towering a rage as his neighbour ; “let me but get at thee, I’ll maul thee I warrant ;” and both proceeded to strike the empty air in a most terrible passion ever seen—ever and anon giving the panels such famous thumps that it made their knuckles smart again.

“Dost call this going to hear a godly man at Hillsborough, thou traitorous caitiff ?” sarcastically asked the vintner, hitting on all sides of him, and jumping here and now there, in his desire to punish his false neighbour.

“Ay, marry, as much as it be going to Cousin Birch’s,” retorted the other, coming on more cautiously and with less noise, yet no less intent on vengeance. In consequence of the one being so wonderful quick in his movements, and the other so quiet he could not be heard moving, there was



no harm done for a good space, save by hurting themselves stumbling over chairs and the like, which was sure to make he who was hurt in a greater rage than ever, and to be more intent upon having his vengeance of the other. It would have been a goodly sight to have seen this precious pair of husbands, if they could have been seen in the darkness, each so earnest upon punishing of the other for the same thing he was himself guilty of, and giving vent to no lack of ill names and execrations, which he who uttered quite as richly merited as he to whom they were addressed. At last the vintner got within an open door at the top of the room, where the draper pounced upon him like a cat, and as they were tussling away with all their might it was closed behind them and fastened without their knowledge. Neither had the slightest idea he was now in a different chamber, for in truth neither had time to give the matter a thought, each having enough to do to defend himself from the other's hearty cuffs, sometimes rolling together on the floor, and anon hustling each other on their legs, yet with no great damage to either. After some minutes spent this way both left off, being completely out of breath with their great exertions. Somewhat to their astonishment they heard loud bursts of laughter from the adjoining chamber, and noticing the light streaming from under the door, both impelled by the same curiousness, crept softly towards it.

Jonathan Dowlas stooped to take a peep at the key-hole ; Timothy Malmsey put his eye to a crack in the panel,—each was aware of the other's vicinity, but not a word was said by either. They looked, and beheld a supper-table well laid, at which two handsome gallants clad in delicate suits, with rapier and dagger, were regaling themselves and making merry, evidently to their heart's contentment ; whilst the Widow Pippins stood by as if waiting upon them, and giving them a narration, which she seemed as though she could scarce tell for laughing.

“ Indeed, an' it please your worships, it be the very excellentest trick ever I heard of,” said she, holding of her sides. “ Here came these poor fools of husbands, each desperately enamoured of his friend's wife, which these merry women allowed of only that they might the better punish them as they deserved. I'faith, what wittols must they have been to have fancied themselves likely to prevail with such. They ought to have known that when a pretty woman is so inclined she looketh to something above her. There is no temptation in it else. Little guess Master Dowlas and Master Malmsey, that 'tis your worship's they care for, and none other.”

“ Here's a horrid villainy come to light !” muttered the draper.

“ Oh, what a vile quean have I for a wife !” exclaimed the enraged vintner in the same low voice.

“ Little guess they how oft you two have had secret meetings here with their buxom wives,” added the widow ; “ or what exquisite sweet pleasures you have found in their delectable company.”

“ O’ my word, neighbour, methinks we have been foully wronged !” cried Jonathan in a monstrous dismal tone.

“ ’Slight, there be no doubt on’t !” answered Timothy, manifestly in a still worse to do. “ Alack ! my head aches horribly.”

“ By my troth, I do feel a sort of shooting pain there myself,” added the other rubbing his forehead with his palm very dolefully.

“ I pray your worships, make haste,” continued the laughing widow. “ There is Mistress Malmsey below stairs, and Mistress Dowlas in the next chamber wonderfully impatient to have with them their several lovers. Never saw I women so dote on men as they dote on your worships. Alack for their simple husbands !”

“ We’ve been infamously abused, neighbour !” exclaimed the draper, whilst the others in the next chamber were laughing very merrily. “ As I live, we are two miserably wretched husbands.” And thereupon, mayhap out of sympathy for his brother in misfortune, he threw his arms around his neck and moaned very pitifully.

“ God’s precious ! I shall go mad !” cried the

vintner lifting up one leg and then the other, like a goose treading on hot bricks. "But shall we not burst in on these dainty gallants, neighbour, and spoil their sport?"

"Nay, nay, see you not they have weapons," whispered his more cautious companion. "Peradventure they would give us our deaths were we to venture upon them unarmed. Let us seek to get out of this place as speedily as we may, and find assistance; doubtless we shall be in time to disturb them at their villanies, and so rid ourselves of our cozening false wives, and be revenged on their paramours."

"Ha! prythee set about it on the instant," said the other; then Master Dowlas began feeling of his way along the wainscot with his brother alderman close at his heels doing the like thing, till they came to a door, which was soon opened by the former, and to the great joy of both, proved to lead out into the gallery. From here they were not long before they found themselves in the parlour of the house, where was a famous company assembled of their friends and neighbours, among whom were John Shakspeare, the high bailiff, and Oliver Dumps the constable. These were quickly informed of the grievous wrong doing, in such moving terms, that the whole party, arming themselves with what weapons they could conveniently lay a hold

on, proceeded under the command of their chief magistrate to seize upon the offenders.

“What a villainous world is this!” exclaimed Oliver, putting on his most melancholy visage. “Marry, an’ aldermen’s wives must needs take to such evil courses, how shall a constable’s wife escape?”

They soon burst into the chamber, where they found the two gallants up in a corner with their backs towards them, with the Widow Pippins standing in a manner as though she would not have her guests rudely meddled with.

“Hullo, my masters!” exclaimed she. “Are ye mad—that ye enter thus unmannerly before two gentlemen of worship?”

“Mind her not, neighbours—she is nothing better than a very villainous go-between!” exclaimed Master Alderman Malmsey, in his deadly rage flourishing of a spit he had got in his hand as if he would do one or other of them some dreadful injury.

“These be the same two fine fellows that must needs be meddling with our wives:—I will take my oath on’t!” cried Master Alderman Dowlas in a horrible bad passion, pointing towards them with the kitchen poker.

“Down with them!” shouted one.

“Let us despatch them straight!” bawled a second.

"By goles, we will be their deaths—the monstrous villains that cannot let honest men's wives alone," cried a third; and all seemed moving forward with mischief in their looks.

"Respect the law, neighbours, respect the law!" exclaimed the constable, striving all he could to repress the desire for instant vengeance so manifest in his companions.

"Ay, we must have no violence, my masters," added John Shakspeare. "If these persons have done ought amiss, I will take care they shall answer for it, but I cannot allow of their being hurt."

"Oh, what monstrous behaviour is this in an honest woman's house!" cried the widow Pippins.

"Stand aside, Mistress, I prythee," exclaimed Oliver Dumps pushing by the widow, and seizing hold of one of the gallants by the shoulder, added in a louder voice, "surrender you in the queen's name."

"Now, neighbour Dowlas," said John Shakspeare, "look you in the face of this one, and say if you can swear him to be the villain that playeth the wanton with your wife: and you, neighbour Malmsey, do the same with the other."

"I warrant you," replied both, moving with alacrity, and with the terriblest revengeful aspects ever seen, to do what their high bailiff had required. Each caught hold of one of the dainty young gentlemen with great rudeness, and poked his beard

close in his face, and each at the same moment started back as though he had been shot, amid the loud laughter of every one in the room. These gallants proved to be no other than their own wives; and all present had been let in the secret by them for the more complete punishing of their faithless husbands.

“Go to, for a sly fox!” cried the Widow Pippins, giving Master Dowlas just such another famous slap of the back as she had saluted him with on his first entrance to the chamber. “I’faith, thou art a sad rogue,” added she, fetching Master Malmsey so absolute a poke i’ the ribs that it put the other poke, bad as he had thought it, clean out of his remembrance. The jests that were broke upon these poor aldermen by their neighbours were out of all calculation, and they were so ashamed they could say never a word for themselves. And indeed they made a famous pretty figure—their best apparel being all covered with dust and broken rushes from rolling on the floor, and their hands and faces, hair and beards, instead of being in such delicate trim as when they first entered “The Rose,” were in as dirty a pickle as was any chimney sweep’s. However, they ever after turned out to be the best of husbands, and would as lief have taken a mad bull by the horns, as sought to make love to another man’s wife.

## CHAPTER VI.

*And then the whining SCHOOL-BOY  
With satchel and shining morning face  
Creeping, like snail, unwillingly to school.*

SHAKSPEARE.

Some there are,  
Which by sophistic tricks, aspire that name  
Which I would gladly lose, of necromancer ;  
As some that use to juggle upon cards,  
Seeming to conjure, when indeed they cheat :  
Others that raise up their confederate spirits  
'Bout windmills, and endanger their own necks  
For making of a squib ; and some there are  
Will keep a curtal to shew juggling tricks,  
And give out 'tis a spirit ; besides these,  
Such a whole ream of almanack-makers, figure flingers,  
Fellows, indeed, that only live by stealth,  
Since they do merely lie about stolen goods,  
They'd make men think the devil were fast and loose,  
With speaking fustian Latin.

WEBSTER.

“ BRING hither thy hat, William, I prythee, 'tis nigh upon school time,” said Dame Shakspeare to her young son, as they were together in her chamber.

“ Ay, that is it,” replied he, doing what he was desired with a very cheerful spirit. “ 'Sooth, though I lack knowing what manner of pleasure is found in school, methinks it must needs be none so little, nurse Cicely speaketh of it so bravely.” The



mother carefully smoothed the hat, and placed it on her child's head, smiling the whilst, either at what had just fallen from him, or mayhap at his exceeding comeliness, now she had, after infinite paining-taking, attired him with such a shew of neatness and cleanliness as made him appear worthy of any mother's love, were she the proudest in the land.

"Nay, school hath its pains also," replied she; "but such are unknown of any, save unworthy boys, who care more for play than for book, and will learn nothing that is set them."

"Well, an' they behave so ill, it be plain they deserve no better," observed the boy. "Yet, it seemeth to me, from what I have learned of nurse Cicely in ballads and stories, and from such sweet verses as you have oft times repeated to me concerning of brave knights and fair ladies, that if other pleasures of a still sweeter sort are to be found in books, whereof you can know only by going to school and conning your lesson with all proper diligence, school cannot help being as pleasant a place for good boys as any goodly place that can be named."

"Doubtless," answered the mother, evidently pleased at noting in her son such sensibleness at so early an age. Then she busied herself in putting each part of his dress as it should be, smoothing this, and pulling down that, and turning him round with a thorough, yet most affectionate scrutiny, that no

fault should escape her. At last, she appeared satisfied with her labours, and hanging round his neck a satchel, that looked as if it contained no great weight of books, she quickly put on her own hat and cloak, and laying hold of him by one hand, carrying of a basket in the other, with many cheerful pleasant words to his unceasing interrogatories, she led him out at the door.

The good dame, and her young son, proceeded together through a part of the town, with such passing commendation and salutations from such of the neighbours as were standing at their doors or approaching them as they went, till they came to the lane where John a Combe was set on by Master Buzzard and his man Saul, as hath been related, when, in the middle of some speech of his, the boy let go his mother's hand, and as forgetful of school, of goodly books, and of sweet verses—which had formed the staple of his talking all along—as though such things had never been, he on a sudden, darted off as fast as he could after a butterfly that came flying past him. Dame Shakspeare called many times, but it appeared as if he heard not her voice, for with his hat in his hand he run, now on one side of the lane, now on the other, and now dodging hither and thither wheresoever the dainty insect spread its delicate wings, as if there could not be in this whole world any one thing of such huge importance to him as the catching of

that butterfly. At last, his mother was obliged to hasten after him, finding he heeded not her calling called she ever so, and succeeded in overtaking her little truant, just as he stood, with his hat thrown on the grass in a vain essay to catch what he had been in such earnest chase of—with hands and eyes uplifted, watching with some vexedness in his aspect, the swift retreat of the enticing insect over the hedge.

Some scolding followed this as the good dame wiped her son's hot face, and dusted and smoothed his hat, and set it on his head again; but he made such famous excuses concerning of the marvellous beautifulness of this same butterfly beyond all butterflies he had ever seen, that the loving mother contented herself in the end with kissing him, and bidding him never again run from her side. The great delight he had found in what he had previously talked so largely of now left him altogether, and he could say nought, save of what rare pleasure would have been his had it been his good hap to have captured that choice fly, with sundry pertinent questions concerning of whence came such brave toys, how lived they, and whether they could not be kept at home, and fed on marchpane, and such other delicacies as he could give them, to all which she answered as she best could. On a sudden he started a new subject, for spying of many wild flowers on the bank he must needs stop to gather

some. In vain, his mother reminded him of what great promise he had made of diligence in learning, and alacrity in going to school, he implored so movingly, she could not help allowing him what he required of her; and this led to his stopping at other flowers he saw, to do the like thing, making such pretty exclamations of admiration at the sight of them, that the good dame could not find it in her heart to speak of his tarrying as he did, with any harshness. Presently, a bird flitting through the hedge, would make him pause in a strange wonder to look after it; and all his talk of flowers in a moment changed to as importunate a questioning upon the birds. Indeed, school now seemed to have no more charm for him than hath the brightest landscape for a blind man; and he kept so tarrying for this thing and for the other, as shewed he was in no little reluctance to be taken away from such fair sights.

Certes, it is a long lane that hath no turning, and the boy, with his mother, got at last to their journey's end, which proved to be a low mean building at the outskirts of the town, whereof part of the casement having been broken, the missing panes had been pasted over with leaves of copy-books. It was a wooden building, crumbling with age in many places, with a ragged thatch, of so dark a colour it could not help being of some standing, underneath which were sundry nests, with the birds

flying in and out; and upon it, up to the roof-top, was a famous company of sparrows, flitting about and making so great a chirruping as was wonderful to hear. The door being open, there was heard a low murmuring as of the humming of a whole hive of bees, which increased in loudness as they came nearer, till it was interrupted by a loud rough voice, calling out " Silence !" when it sunk a little. At this moment they entered at the door. They came first into a chamber with a brick flooring, where they saw a number of small boys; some seated upon old forms, clipped at the corners, and carved with letters of every sort, as might be seen by the empty ones; and others, in groups, standing before one or two bigger boys, each of whom held a book as if hearing the others their lessons; but as soon as the strangers were observed, there was seen on the instant, an infinite lack of both learning and teaching amongst all. One whispered to another—others pointed—and some stood up to have a better view; and all stretched their necks, and strained their eyes, in a very absolute marvel, as to the intent of the dame and her son in coming there at that time.

The two were curiously and stedfastly gazed on by every boy there, as they advanced up two steps that led to a part of the same chamber, having a boarded floor, where were some long desks, at which bigger boys had been writing of

copies, with one of a greater height at the top, where sat on a tall stool no less a personage than Stripes the schoolmaster, of whom the reader hath already some knowledge. He sat up stiff as a post; his gaunt visage as thin and sharp as though his ordinary diet was of flint stones, or other such matter that affordeth wonderful poor nourishment; his hair and beard standing in great need of the barber's art; an old gaberline on, which for its rags the cursedest old Jew that ever clipped coin would have been ashamed to have been seen in; his falling bands rumpled and soiled; his bases open at the knees, and his hose in slovenly folds falling down his shrunk shanks to his heels, where a pair of huge pantofles, of the oldest out of all doubt, hid in some measure the numberless holes that had there begun to show themselves. He held a cane upright in one hand, and in the other a book, having before him a boy, who, by the earnest scratching of his head, and the intentness of his gaze at the broken ceiling, had doubtless come to a halt in his lesson; and his dull stupid face wore an aspect of severe seriousness, which boded no good to the young student. But for all this, as he caught sight of Dame Shakspeare with her son advancing towards him, the cane was put out of sight in the twinkling of an eye, and a sort of something that was meant to be a smile became visible in his cadaverous countenance, as he gave the

unprepared scholar back his book, and bade him to his place.

Marvellous to look on was the suavity with which the pedagogue heard Dame Shakspeare say she had brought her son William to have his schooling, hoping he would prove an apt scholar; thereupon famously did he launch out into all manner of fine scholar-like phrases, whereof it was in no way easy for any to find where lay the sense, and then proceeded he to catechise the child in a monstrous pedantical humour, and to examine him as to the extent of his acquirements in the rudiments of profane learning; and although the boy shewed some shyness, which was exceeding natural at his age, before so forbidding a person, yet, by dint of his mother's praises, he was got to evince a tolerable acquaintance with the spelling of simple words. All this time the curiousness of the entire school exceedeth conception. No sign of studiousness was visible in any; instead of which the eyes and ears of the whole assembly were bent upon getting the completest knowledge of what was going on; and whilst some of the highest part of the school kneeled on their seats, or leaned over their school-fellows, sundry of the bottom part stood on their forms, and a few crept up the steps, with countenances all agog to learn as much as they could of this strange matter.

“ And I have brought you here a fine capon

for your own eating, worthy Master Stripes," said Dame Shakspeare to the schoolmaster, whose mouth seemed to water at the very name of such delicate food, as she took from her basket a fowl carefully wrapped about in a clean white cloth ; " the which I hope will prove to your liking, and I do trust you will favour me in what my heart most covets, so much as to give what attentiveness you can to my boy's schooling, that he may do you credit in his after years."

" I am a very heathen an' I do not," replied he, taking the gift with a famous willingness.

" Then I will now leave him to your charge," observed the dame, and, kissing of her young son, with a loving admonition to be a good boy and speed in his learning, she departed out at the door. Stripes, first placing of his new scholar amongst others of his age in the lower room, which movement of his caused a famous shew of studiousness amongst all the boys he came nigh, and setting him a lesson, returned to his desk ; and then, undoing the cloth, examined the capon both with his eyes and his nose, with such extreme satisfaction, it looked as though he cared not to wait for the cooking. At last, putting it in the cloth again, he marched with it out at a door close upon his desk, feasting his eyes upon it as he went. Scarce had the door well closed upon him, when there arose such a hubbub in the school, of talking and shouting one



to another of all the boys concerning of the new comer; those who had some knowledge of his parentage telling others who had none, and some of the bigger boys leaving their places to have a closer view of him, or ask him questions, as seemed to astonish William Shakspeare exceedingly; but he was not allowed to be in a long marvel, for the door opened presently, and then there was an instant scuttling to places, and an infinite affectation of attentiveness every where. Speedily as this was done it escaped not the eye of the master, who seized on his cane in a twinkling as soon as he had entered, with an eye of severe menace, and thundered out his commands for sundry of the offenders to come up to him without delay; for although he was so obsequious in his spirit before Sir Nathaniel and others he was fearful of offending, no greater a tyrant ever lived than was he to his scholars.

“ So, Jemmy Sheepshanks !” cried he, as the first offender approached him with some backwardness; “ prythee, what need hadst out of thy proper seat without any colour of warrant, thou horribly abominable young caitiff ?”

“ An’ it please you, master, I only——”

“ Silence !” shouted the pedagogue in a voice that appeared to make the little culprit shake in his shoes. “ Art not ashamed to have accommodated thy worthlessness with the graces of my instruction for so long a time as thou hast, and never so much

as brought me a single egg, much less a fine capon, such as worthy Dame Shakspeare, on her first coming, hath appurtenanced me with—and thy mother having such a prodigal store of poultry? By Jove, his searching thunders! thou art as barren of good fruit as a whipping-post. Prythee, hold me thy digital extremity.”

“In good fay, master, I only went——”

“Thy hand, Jemmy Sheepshanks!” bawled Stripes, in a manner which brought forth a right dolorous wailing, and the tremulous projection of a palm of considerable dirtiness a few inches before the offender’s stomach. “Elevate it somewhat!” continued he, eyeing the shaking fingers as a vulture would the prey he was about to sweep down upon. “Somewhat more!” added he in a louder voice; and whack went the descending cane across the dirty little hand. “Ya!” screamed the boy, and thereupon he doubled himself up as if he had an inward pain of great fierceness, and then he shook his hand and rubbed it against his jerkin, and held it in the other, as though he had had a hot cinder in it, and made such a yelling all the whilst as was pitiful to hear.

“And now thy sinister manus; for methinks it be very monstrous injustice one should ’scape, and the other not,” observed the schoolmaster, getting his weapon in readiness.

“Nay, o’ my life, good Master Stripes!” roared

the urchin in a deprecating tone ; but he was not let off so easy, for the left hand presently fared as badly as the right, and then, with a parting crack o' the crown for jerking his hand away, so that the pedagogue missed it more than once, Jemmy Sheepshanks in a terrible uproar was sent back to his seat. The rest of those who had been called up looked on as though they would have given all they were worth to have been a good hundred miles from the spot. The other boys were studying of their separate tasks with a seeming diligence that could never have been exceeded, and their new schoolfellow was thinking in his mind, from this first example he had had of school, it was no such brave place after all. Each of the offenders went through the same discipline, save the last, and was as well reminded as the first had been of certain remissness on his part in not having brought some nice thing or other for their worthy master.

“Ha, Mat Turnspit ! thou art most superlatively offensive !” exclaimed the pedagogue, looking at the remaining one with the same savage aspect as had been the forerunner of the others' punishments. “I have cast up the sum of thy offences, the product whereof——”

“An' it please you, master, father killed a hog last night,” cried out the boy, sharply, yet not without some trepidation.

“Marry, what then? The particularities—the conclusion, I prythee!” cried his master.

“An’ it please you,” answered little Mat, “mother told me to say, an’ your worship’s stomach stood in any way affected towards pig’s chitlings, she would send you as famous a dish of them as should delight the cockles of your heart mightily.”

“Thy mother, I would wager to be as honest a woman as any of her inches,” observed Stripes, his aspect of a sudden changing to an absolute graciousness. “And touching pig’s chitlings, I would have thee communicate to her auditories, I consider them as savoury diet as any thing that can be eaten, and will accept of a dish with abundance of thanks. As for thyself, Mat Turnspit, I doubt not thou hadst excellent cause for being out of thy seat. Get thee back again straight, and be sure thy remembrance plays not the truant with the pig’s chitlings.”

After this, the first class were called up to their reading lesson, and putting up their copies, each holding of a book, presently stood in a half circle before their teacher, who, seated on his high stool, with his cane in his hand, and the lesson before him, never failed to apply the former to the palms of such as were amiss in their reading—constantly commenting on the exceeding properness of behaviour shewn by Dame Shakspeare and Dame Turnspit, in the matter of the fat capon and the pig’s chitlings. All this while there was a famous

thinking going on in the young mind of the new scholar, whose faith in the pleasantness of schools diminished with every blow he heard given, till at last he came to the conclusion, that it was the very horriblemst bad place he had ever entered: nevertheless he applied himself to his lesson as earnestly as he might, with no greater interruption than what came from some little neighbour sidling up to him with a civil speech, intent upon being on the best of terms with a schoolfellow so well recommended of their master.

As Stripes was very furious lecturing of a boy, about to undergo the customary discipline, the door behind him opened, and there appeared at it a strange looking object in the likeness of an overgrown boy. To all appearance, the schoolmaster looked as lean a dog as ever licked an empty trencher, but he was of a very corpulency in comparison with the walking bunch of bones known throughout the town as Skinney Dickon, the schoolmaster's boy, that now entered the school-room. His face had the projecting jaws of a ravenous crocodile, with the complexion of a kite's foot, and his rusty hair straggled over his skull like a mop worn to the very stump—this was supported on a long thin neck bare of all clothing to the shoulder blade, where a leather jerkin, made for a boy half his size, was buttoned tight with a small skewer (for lack of buttons, which had all been worn off), whereof the

sleeves came only to his elbows, shewing his naked arms, like the picked drum sticks of some huge fowl, with the claw left on. A pair of greasy gaskins, that seemed as though they had been made for a grasshopper, encased the lower part of his body to his knees, below which two bare legs, as barren of calf as an andiron, descended till they were partly lost sight of in two old shoes, whereof the wide gaping of the upper leathers told plainly of the whereabouts of the owner's ten toes.

"How now, Dickon!" exclaimed his master, as soon as he became aware of the other's vicinity.

"An' it pul-pul-pul-pul, please your worship, the kick-kick-kick-kick cat's run off with the kick-kick-kick-kick capon." Scarce had the words got loose from the chopping teeth of his stuttering boy, ere Stripes jumped from his stool with a ludicrous astounded look, and brushing by his intelligencer with such furiousness as to lay him his length on the floor, sought the thief, swearing all sorts of horrible oaths and direful imprecations; after running frantically to and fro, the enraged schoolmaster spied puss on a shelf in an outhouse, tearing up the flesh of the fowl after a fashion as evinced her appreciation of its goodness. She was an old, large, black animal, whose projecting ribs manifested the like relationship with famine as appeared in the master and his boy; and, made desperate by extreme hunger, she raised her back, glared with her

green eyes, and commenced so brisk a spitting and swearing, as the schoolmaster, in a terrible tearing passion, began cutting at her with his cane—though at a respectful distance—as proved she would not be got to part with her prize without a tustle; and mayhap he would have been but badly off had she flown at him, the which she appeared monstrously inclined to do, but at this moment she spied Dickon hastening to the rescue with the stump of a broom, which caused her to make a movement as though she would carry off her booty—however, before she had got a firm hold of the fowl with her old teeth, Dickon gave her so sore a blow with his weapon as sent her flying off the shelf into an open water-butt that stood a yard or so off, whereupon she was glad enough to save her nine lives the best way she could, as if capons had never been

This occurred not without some stir in the school; but scarce had Stripes returned to his desk after placing of his heart's treasure in a place of safety, when his anatomy of a boy again made his appearance at the open door, at sight of whom he opened his lanthorn jaws, quite aghast with surprise, thinking that the villainous cat had again made away with his dainty; but Dickon came only to announce he arrival of one Mother Flytrap on an errand of conjuring, which speedily allayed his master's alarm. Dismissing the class to their seats with a perilous threat kept they not as quiet as mice till his return,

the pedagogue stalked, with an air of marvellous solemnity—little in accordance with his slovenly gaunt figure—into an inner chamber, meanly furnished with an old table and a chair or two, yet having, in the shape of a globe in the window, a snake in a bottle over the chimney, and a curious hieroglyphic book spread out upon the table: various signs that it was in especial use for learned purposes. A little woman, whose shrivelled skin savoured of some antiquity, stood in a corner of the chamber, in a grey cloak and peaked hat, leaning with both hands upon a stick she held before her.

“An’ it please your worship,” began she, parting the exceeding closeness of her nose and chin, and hobbling two steps forward as Stripes entered, “be it known to you, of all the days in the year, last Wednesday was a week, wanting of a spoon for a gossip of mine—as worthy a good soul as ever broke bread, for all it hath been said of her she taketh to her aquæ vitæ bottle more than is becoming in an honest woman:—but Lord! Lord! who shall escape the bruit of slanderous tongues in this cantankerous age;—as I was a saying, over a sea-coal fire, at Dame Marigold’s—who was making as famous a bowl of spiced ale, with a roasted crab, as ever passed mortal lips. Indeed, of all women I know, an’ it please your worship, she excelleth in the brewing of such delicate liquor; and last sheep-shearing I did hear little Jack Maggot, of Maggot



Mill—he that got his head broke at a bout at single stick with Job Styles, the hedger of our town—say he knew none of these parts that had such cunning in these preparations. Mercy o’ my heart ! I have known the time when Job Styles was better off than he is, by a good ten crowns a year. But we are all mortal.”

“ Hast lost a spoon ? ” enquired the schoolmaster, when his companion stopped to take breath.

“ Ay, marry,” replied Mother Flytrap, “ as goodly a silver Evangelist as you shall find come of any god-father ; and the only one of the four left. O’ my word, it vexeth me to find the world groweth every day more dishonest ; and no more heed is taken of so godly a gift as an Evangelist spoon, than of a dish of beans. Well—flesh is grass : so it’s what we must all come to—more’s the pity—more’s the pity.”

“ When lost thou this spoon ? ” asked Stripes.

“ Marry, an’ it please your worship, I know not,” replied his companion ; “ but last Wednesday was a week, as I have said, when it was getting nigh upon noon, I had made me a porridge fit for the Sophy, with good store of leeks in it, for my dinner, when who should enter at my door but Gammer Bavins, whose son went to the wars and died beyond seas ; whereupon desiring of her to rest herself, as in all civilness I was bound, seeing that her mother’s cousin’s great uncle and my grannum were cousins—

german, I asked of her to have some of my famous porridge, to the which she cheerfully gave her consentings; and thinking 'twould be but respectful of me to allow of her having a silver spoon instead of a latten one, the whilst she was telling of me an excellent famous story of what brave eating was in porridge such as she was wont to make for her Gaffer when he came home from the woods—for your worship must know he had been a woodman, and of some repute in the craft—and how monstrously he took to it when she could chop in a handsome piece of bacon fat, with a pinch of mustard—though for mine own part methinks good hog's lard in some quantity, with a sprinkling of bay salt, giveth much the delicateser flavour——”

“So the spoon was missing?” here put in the schoolmaster.

“La you! what a wonderful conjuror is your worship!” exclaimed Mother Flytrap, lifting up her hands and eyes in amazement; “ay, was it: and though I have since searched high and low in every crack and cranny hole and corner from housetop to floor, if I have caught as much as a glimpse of it there is no hotness in ginger. Peradventure——”

“Thou hast come to learn of thy missing spoon?” said Stripes, knowing full well should he let her run on there would be no stopping of her tongue.

“Odds codlings, yes, an' it please you,” replied she: “well! never saw I your like at finding out

things: as I live I said not a word of the sort. Mayhap your worship knoweth whom I suspect of stealing it; and by my troth I doubt not it shall be found without some grounds, for she hath the reputation of a horrible pilferer."

"Thy suspicions rest upon a woman!" answered Stripes, with a very proper solemnity.

"A grace of God! your worship must needs have dealings with the old one!" cried his companion in a famous astonishment; "Marian Loosefish be as nigh to a woman as ever she will be, for she hath had two children and never a husband, and hath been thrice put into the stocks for misbecomingness. But we are all mortal. More's the pity—more's the pity!"

"And thou wouldst have me ascertain by virtue of my art with what correctness thou dost suspect this woman?" added the schoolmaster.

"Ay, dear heart, out of all doubt, and I have brought your worship as exquisite nice a black-pudding as ever was made," answered the other, producing from under her cloak a large sausage of this sort, which her companion eased her of with marvellous alacrity; "and will, besides, give your worship a tester for your pains, provided you can put the stealing of it upon her with such certainty she shall never be able to deny it, and so I get back my spoon again."

"Prythee stay where thou art, and keep strict

silence," said the schoolmaster, with a very earnest seriousness, as he took a long black wand out of a corner, and put on his head a strange looking conical cap, of a blood-red colour, which made his visage look all the more lean and ghastly ; then gazed he with terrible severity on his book, turning over the leaves for some minutes, Mother Flytrap looking on with a fearful curiousness, as dumb as a stone.

"Mercury in the sixth house," muttered the conjuror, as if to himself.

"I warrant you that is my house ; for mine is just the sixth in the row as you enter the town," observed she.

"Silence, woman !" shouted Stripes, authoritatively, then presently added in an under tone—"Jupiter and Venus in conjunction, whereof the affinities in equilibrio being geometrical to their qualities, giveth sign of some heavy metal, of an express white colour, and in shape of some narrowness, with a concavity at the determination. Ha ! what meaneth this !—Diana under a cloud——"

"That's her, an' it please you !" said Mother Flytrap, eagerly ; "she hath been 'under a cloud' at sundry several times, which be well known of many, for she is as absolute a——"

"Peace, I tell thee !" bawled the conjuror ; "wouldst turpify my astrologicals ? Prythee hold thy prate : " after which he continued without other interruption a deal more of similar heathenish words.

“ My art telleth me these three things,” observed he to her at last, as grave as any judge ; “ to wit—thy spoon hath been stolen, an’ thou hast not mislaid it in some secret place ;—provided a thief hath got it, there shall be no doubt it hath been stolen ;—and should it be found upon Marian Loosefish, beyond all contradicting she may be suspected of the theft.”

“ Wonderful !” cried the old woman, in a huge amazement ; “ of all conjuring never heard I of anything like unto this ! I would have sworn it was her before your worship had told me a letter of her name ; for I have all along suspected her and no other. I protest I am in so great an admiration of your worship’s marvellous deep knowledge I scarce know what to be at. Odds codlings, what wonders the world hath !”

“ At thy peril, speak another word till I tell thee !” exclaimed the reputed conjuror, in a formidable solemn voice, as if desirous of still more impressing his customer with his thorough knowledge of the occult science : “ I charge thee make no manner of noise, else ill will befall thee. I would know more of this matter, and will have my familiar to acquaint me with the particularities.” At this the old dame, dumb with extreme fright and curiosity, backed herself into a corner of the chamber, as Stripes, waving of his wand mysteriously, and repeating some unintelligible jargon, stalked round and round the table. All at once they heard a

horrible strange sort of sound, like unto the deep grunting of an over fed hog, which the conjuror, in ignorance of its cause, fancied to be something unnatural coming to punish him for his vain-glorious boast of intimacy with a familiar, and straightway stopped his conjurations; and Mother Flytrap, too frightened to speak, hearing the sounds, and observing the half-starved black cat at this moment push her way through the unclosed door,—her back raised and her eyes glaring as she caught sight of her master with the uplifted wand, supposing he was about to punish her for her dishonesty,—had no doubt she was a demon invoked by the schoolmaster, and thereupon striking out with her stick convulsively before her, she commenced crouching down into the corner, every time uttering of a scream so piercing it seemed as though she were about giving up the ghost.

Her outcry soon brought Skinny Dickon into the chamber, who, spying of the two in such a terrible monstrous fear, looked from one to the other with his jaws gaping like a hungry pike, till hearing of the strange unearthly sound, and seeing his master had been at his conjurations, a horrible suspicion seemed to come across him of a sudden; and he dropped on his knees, as though he had been shot. Presently, some of the scholars came creeping towards the door, the back ones peeping over the forward ones' shoulders, with aspects

alarmed and anxious ; and the old woman's screams continuing, sundry of the neighbours rushed in at another door by which she had herself entered, marvelling prodigiously to hear such a disturbance ; and marvelling the more, to note what they beheld at their entrance.

“ In God's name, neighbour, what meaneth this strange scene ? ” enquired a sober honest-looking artisan, in his leather apron and cap, gazing from one to another of the group in a famous astonishment.

“ Ya ! ” screamed Mother Flytrap, again crouching down in the corner, and poking out her stick, with her eyes fixed upon the object of her exceeding terror, as though it held a spell over her.

“ Mum-mum-mum-mum-Master's been — rer-rer-rer-raising the devil ! ” stuttered out Dickon, as plain as he could, for the fright he was in.

“ Ya ! ” repeated the old woman, with the same look and gesture.

“ He's there ! ” muttered the trembling school-master, pointing to a closet whence the sounds seemed to proceed ; whereupon there was an instant backward movement of his neighbours, save only the artizan ; and the old woman screamed more lustily than ever, for she believed the cat was meant, as having her gaze fixed upon the animal, she had not seen where the frightened pedagogue had pointed.

“ With the Lord’s help, mayhap, I will unkennel him, if there he be,” observed the artisan, making a forward movement.

“ Nay, o’ my life, David Hurdle, thou must be mad, sure ?” exclaimed one ; and others cried out against his seeking of such danger, and many were for holding him, to prevent his destruction, as they thought.

“ Fear nought,” said the artisan, breaking from his alarmed neighbours ; “ we are in the Lord’s hands. He will not deliver his people into the power of the spoiler.” Then walking boldly up to the closet, the door of which he fearlessly opened, he added, in a firm voice, “ I charge thee, if thou art an unclean spirit, depart from the dwelling of this man.”

The interior was too dark for any there to see into, therefore was nothing visible ; but the terror-struck people noticed the instantaneous stoppage of that smothered grunting which sounded so unearthly ; and could plainly enough distinguish a rustling as of some one moving, which again caused an instant rush to the door.

“ I charge thee begone !” cried David Hurdle, undauntedly.

“ What dost charge me ?” grumbled a deep thick voice from the closet. “ Prythee, keep it on the score, and give us ’tother pot. Eh, Tickle-breech ?”



“As I live ’tis Sir Nathaniel!” cried several voices at once, to the wonderful relief of the rest; and sure enough, Sir Nathaniel it was, who, after so absolute a carouse the previous night with his customary boon companions, his senses had completely left him, had returned home with the schoolmaster, without whose knowledge he had thrust himself into the closet, where he had been snoring the whole morning, coiled up like a monstrous caterpillar; whereby he had put so sudden a stop on his friend’s conjurations, and had nigh driven Mother Flytrap out of her five wits.

## CHAPTER VII.

The mery lark, messengere of the day,  
 Saluteth in her song the morowe gray;  
 And firie Phebus ryseth up, so bright  
 That all the orient laugheth at the sight:  
 And with his stremis dryeth in the greves,  
 The silver dropis hanging in the leves.

CHAUCER.

For I am servant of the lawe,  
 Covetouse is myne owne felowe.

OLD MORALITY.

Out on you thêeffes, bouth two!  
 Eich man maye see you be soe,  
     Alby your arraye  
 Muffled in mantles none such I know,  
 I shall make you lowte full lowe,  
     Or I departe you froe.

ANTICHRIST.

MASTER BUZZARD sat at table eating of a pasty made of game birds, and ever and anon flinging a bone to one of the many dogs looking wistfully up at him. He was taking of his morning repast in the same hall of his, which hath before been described, at interims enjoying frequent and plentiful draughts at a tankard that stood close at his trencher; and then again, swearing lustily at such of the dogs who, in their impatience to have of the delicate victual, mayhap would leap to his lap, or remind him of their nearness by giving him a smart blow

of the leg with one of their fore-paws. At a respectful distance, with his hat on his knees, and his stick beside it, sat the shrunk-up figure and parchment physiognomy of Jemmy Catchpole, the town lawyer, seneschal, bailiff, attorney, and steward, as he was indifferently styled.

“ All precepts have been served, an’ it please you,” observed Jemmy Catchpole; “ we have him in fee simple with fine and recovery, but the defendant pleadeth extreme poverty, and prayeth in aid that the suit may be stopped from and after the determination of the last action, else shall he be forced to such shifts as shall put your honour’s hand and seal to his ruin, and cut the entail from all remainders in perpetuity—in witness whereof he hath but now demised, granted, and to farm-let his desire to me that I might be a feodary in this act for such an intervallum as your honour may please to allow.”

“ An’ I wait another hour I’ll be hanged !” rudely exclaimed Master Buzzard, thumping the table with his fist with such force as to startle some of the hawks. “ If he hath not the means of paying his bond, strip him of what he hath. What ! Shall I lend my money to a paltry burgess, and he do me ill offices, and then, when comes time for payment, shall such a fellow think to get off by whining a dolorous plaint concerning of his poverty ? ’Slife !

when I let him, cut me into collops for my hounds."

"As your honour wills it," replied the lawyer; "then will I, without let or hindrance, plea or demurrer, make an extent upon his house and lands, immediately, provided in that case he doth not give instant quittance for his obligation."

"Make him as barren as a rotten branch," cried the other, with a frowning indignant look that spoke as bitterly as his words. "At one swoop bear off his whole possessions. By God's body, an' thou leavest him as much as would keep his beggarly soul for a day, I will have nought to do with thee ever after."

"I am mortgaged to your honour's will," observed his companion, very humbly, as he took his hat and stick in his hand, and rose from his seat. Not long after he had taken himself out of the hall, there entered Saul, booted and spurred, and soiled with dust, as though he had just come off a journey.

"Ha, Saul, art there!" cried his master, his sullen features brightening up abit at the sight of his man; "I expected thee not so soon. But how fareth my noble kinsman?"

"As comfortless as a hound covered with bots," replied Saul, putting on a grin at his conceit. "Down Towler! Away Bess! Back Ponto!" cried he, as sundry of the dogs came leaping up to

him, in sign of his having staid from them some time. "His honourable lordship walketh about like a disturbed spirit; his face hath lost the humour of smiling, and carryeth the affectation of melancholy with as much intentness as a lean raven. He crosseth his arms, and paceth his chamber, and sigheth heavily, and seemeth to have parted with all enjoyment in this world; were he papist now, I doubt not he would turn monk presently."

"'Tis well," observed Master Buzzard, taking to his meal as if with a fresh appetite, at hearing such intelligence; "I am infinitely glad matters go on there so bravely. Here, assay some of this pasty. Perchance, thou art a hungered after thy ride." Saul waited not for a second bidding, but with the familiarity of a long-tolerated villain, drew to the table, and helped himself without stint.

"What dost think, Saul?" enquired his master, putting down his knife, and looking with a peculiar knowingness at his man, after they had been silently discussing the pasty for some few minutes.

"I'faith, I know not, master," replied the other, raising his eyes from his trencher.

"I have got that lewd rascal and poor knave in my toil at last," said Master Buzzard.

"What, John Shakspeare?" asked his companion, as though in a sort of pleased surprise.

"No other," answered his master, evidently with a like devilish satisfaction. "He shall presently

be turned upon the world as bare as a callow owlet. I have taken care he shall be stripped of all his substance, even to his Sunday jerkin, and sent adrift as complete a beggar as ever lived."

"O' my life, excellent!" exclaimed his man, chafing of his hands as if in great glee; "body o' me, I have not heard such pleasant news this many a day. He will never fine me forty shillings again for breaking a man's head, I'll warrant, or coop me a whole day in the cage, on suspicion of being over civil to a comely woman, as his high bailiffship hath done. Well, an' I make not good sport of this, count my liver as white as a boiled chicken. But here's a goodly stock of patience to him, that he may bear this pitiful change of fortune as he best may!" And so saying, he lifted the tankard to his mouth, and took a hearty draught of it.

"He hath no John a Combe now to help him at his need," added Master Buzzard. "Methinks, too, I have carved out such work for that wight as will keep him like a rat to his hole; for I have at last taken such vengeance as will hurt him more than ever our rapiers could, had we succeeded as I at first wished."

"Truly, he shewed himself a very devil at his weapon," observed the other; "and handled me so in the lane—a murrain on him! I shall bear on my body the marks of his handwriting to my life's

end: therefore, am I all the more glad you have given him his deserts."

"Now truss me with all speed," said his master, at the finishing of his repast, "for I am bound to Sir Thomas Lucy's, and must needs appear becomingly before his worship."

"Ay, marry," replied Saul, trussing his master's points. Shortly after which Master Buzzard mounted his horse, which had been got ready for him at the gate, and rode off in the direction of Fulbroke Park.

It was a fresh morning at the latter end of April, and great rains having fallen for some time, the young foliage was marked with such transparent green as was truly delicate to see—the hedges being fairly clothed all in their new liveries, save here and there a backward hawthorn, or a stump of an old oak the last frosts had taken a stout hold of, shewed its unsightly bare branches. On the banks there was no lack of verdure, sprinkled in famous plentifulness with groups of primroses, cuckoo flowers, snap-jacks, daisies, cowslips, violets, and other sweet harbingers of the summer season. The small birds were making a brave chirruping in and out of the hedges—sparrows, linnets, finches, and tits, out of all number—anon, the traveller would disturb a blackbird or thrush feeding, who would fly off with some noise—close over the adjoining field of rye,

high-soaring, was seen the lark, pouring from her throat such a gush of thrilling music as nought else in nature hath comparison with; at openings in the hedge might be observed glimpses of the adjoining country, which looked very prettily—here, a pasture with numberless sheep on it all cleanly cropped from the late shearing, among which the young lambs were beheld making excellent sport with each other, or running with an innocent plaintive “ba” to the mother ewe, whose deeper voice ever and anon came in with a pleasant harmony—there, a field partly ploughed by a team of oxen, followed by a choice company of rooks, who came to make prey of the worms that were turned up in the furrows—and not a stone’s throw from them was a man scattering of seed in the newly raised soil—whilst close at hand were sundry old people busily engaged at weeding a coming crop. Other fields, of various different tints, stretched themselves out far and wide, till nought could be seen but the hedge rows; and the far off hills and woods, the greenness whereof seemed to vanish in the distance to a deep dark blue.

Nothing of all this brave sight was noticed by Master Buzzard, who rode on his horse with a tercel on his wrist, and a brach-hound at his horse’s heels, careless of all things in nature save only his own selfish schemings and villainous plottings against the happiness of others. He was one for whom the beauties around him had no attractions at any time,



unless, peradventure, it afforded him good sport in hawking or in such other pastimes as he took delight; in fact, from a riotous, headstrong youth, he had grown to be a man void of all principle, seeking his own pleasures, heedless of whatsoever might be in their way; and never hesitating to stoop to any villainy that promised employment to his bad passions, and advantage to himself. Such a one Nature might look in the face, smiling in all her most exquisite comeliness, and he would take of her no more heed than would he the squalid lineaments of a beggar's callet. Indeed, the numberless moving graces of our inestimable kind mother, can only be sufficiently appreciated by those whose eyesight is free from sensual and selfish films, and whose deep hearted love helpeth their vision more admirably than can any glasses, however magnifying they may be.

Master Buzzard proceeded on his journey at a briskish amble, seemingly, by the contraction of his brows, and unpleasing gravity of his aspect, to be meditating somewhat; but of what he was thinking I care not to tell; for it is a standing truth, a bad man's thoughts will do good to none. Sometimes he would start from his reflections to whistle to his hound, should the dog seem inclined to wander away upon the fresh trail of coneys or hares; and then swear a lot of terrible oaths when she returned to his side; or he would walk his horse, to talk and

trifle with his hawk; and then, tired of that, away he would bound again, through the deep lanes, and over the fields, to Charlcote, with his dog some little way behind, carrying of her nose close to the ground, or running on before with a sharp quick bark, constantly stopping and twirling of her head round to look back at her master; and away again, as though it was fine sport to her to be so early a roving. Thus they went till they came to a white gate, at the which Master Buzzard was forced to dismount to open it, and then rode on again through a pasture marked by sweeping undulations, dotted here and there with magnificent oaks and beeches, through which the sunshine came in glances, in a manner as if desirous of having the best aspects of this sylvan scene.

Here the palfrey ambled his prettiest paces, for the close herbage was as velvet to his hoofs, and he stretched out his neck, and shook his mane, and pawed the ground as he went, in a marvellous fine fashion: but all at once he stopped of a sudden, for right across his path, a little in advance of him, there rushed a numerous troop of deer, and Master Buzzard had a great to do in shouting and whistling to call back his brach-hound, who at the first glance of them was for giving chase at the top of her speed. It was a famous sight to see them bounding across the wide valley, and then up the next acclivity, where they stopped,—perchance to note if they were pur-

sued—the young fawns using their slender legs with exceeding swiftness; and amongst the rest might be seen a delicate white doe, made all the more manifest by the sleek backs of her dappled company. Farther on more of these were met with, and, if at any distance, the bucks would not stir; but with antlers erect, they would get together and examine the strangers with a marvellous bold front—anon a partridge would rise before the horse with a startling whirr; and other signs of a like nature met them as they went, which proved plain enough that they were in some goodly park or another. Peradventure, whilst Master Buzzard is making his way to Charlcote, the courteous reader will be right glad to be rid of his villainous company.

At this time Sir Thomas Lucy and his dame were taking a morning's walk in their garden and orchards—mayhap to see how looked the trees for fruit, and the ground for vegetables and flowers. These two were both of some age, that is to say, neither were short of fifty. The knight was somewhat older, of a middle size as regards length, yet his limbs were slim, and his waist no great matter. His countenance was of the simple sort, yet merry withal, for he affected a jest at times, and never failed to laugh at it the heartiest of any; but his constant affectation was of boasting what wild pranks he had done in his youth for all he was now a justice of peace; nevertheless when any offence was put upon him, he

would take upon himself to be in as monstrous a rage as the greatest man in the shire. He wore a high-crowned hat a little on one side, and moved his head with a jaunty air, humming of a song he had learned when at college; and a short ruff surrounded his peaked grey beard. He wore a plum-coloured doublet, with such broad stuffed breeches to his hose as had been lately in fashion, and carried his rapier as daintily as any young gallant. As for his dame, she kept at his side with a dignity, as she imagined, becoming of her station; for as she fancied a justice of peace to be nigh upon the most worshipful of all offices, and her husband, Sir Thomas, to be the most famous justice that ever lived, anything in her behaviour that might savour of levity she would have nought to do with—always excepting she would laugh a little at her husband's jests, as she believed in all obedience she was bound, though she never failed to cry out "fye—fye" as she did it, when they smacked of any naughtiness. In short, she was a simple honest-hearted creature as any that lived, ever ready to make up with kindness what she wanted in sense. She was dressed in an excellent stiff brocade, with a long stomacher and a notable ruff, plaited and set out in the best fashion, and wore high-heeled shoes, which gave to her walk a gravity she could not have otherwise attained; and had her own hair partly concealed under a French hood.

It may be remembered that it was this very lady of whom Master Buzzard spoke so uncivilly at William Shakspeare his christening, touching a young child she had found in her walks abandoned of its parents, and had resolved to bring up tenderly; but in truth, all he said was a most lewd libel, as I doubt not will readily be believed of him, for she was too simple a woman to do anything unlawful, and the child was a true foundling, to whom she had shewn from the first a very womanly charity and affection. Her greatest faults were her unreasonable partialities, which blinded her completely. She could see no wrong in ought that was done by her husband, Sir Thomas, who was not altogether blameless,—or her only son, a boy of at least fifteen years, and a very tyrant to the gentle Mabel, now grown to be a child of exquisite graces of disposition, and his junior by some five or six years.

It hath already been said that the knight and his dame were taking of a morning's walk together; but some way behind these was seen a fair girl, whose clustering light ringlets were caught up by every breeze that blew, setting off as admirable a mild sweet countenance as the most innocent age of childhood ever exhibited. Behind her was a lubberly boy, dressed very daintily in doublet and hose like a young gentleman; and he was amusing himself by picking up small stones and flinging them at her, many of which hit her sore thumps; yet the only

sign she shewed of her dislike of such uncivil treatment, was to beg he would not hurt her so much. These two were the poor foundling and the son of her benefactress ; and this was a sample of the sort of treatment she had of him whenever he could get her away from the observation of those likely to check his rudeness ; for he knew of old she would never complain of him, let his usage of her be ever so bad, and therefore he might continue it, as he thought, with perfect impunity.

“ Pray you, sweet Master Thomas, hit me not so hard !” exclaimed the pretty Mabel, in such winning accents as one might have thought would have subdued a savage, as she strove unavailingly to save herself from the hard missiles with which she was pelted, by putting up her little hands, and shrinking fearfully every time a stone was thrown.

“ Tut, how can I hurt thee, thou little fool ?” replied young Lucy, desisting not a moment from his unmannerly behaviour.

“ Indeed, you do exceedingly, else would I say nought of the matter,” added she.

“ Then thou shouldst have the wit to avoid my aim,” said the boy with a rude laugh. “ But thou makest brave sport, Mabel. O’ my life, I should like to have thee fixed to a stake as cocks are at shrovetide, I warrant I’d give thee famous knocks.”

“ I would do you no such unkindness, believe

me," answered his fair companion. "Nor would I wish to hurt any that live."

"The more fool, thou," exclaimed her tormentor.

"I marvel you should use me so uncivilly," continued the poor girl, smarting with the pain from a fresh blow. "I am sure I have done nought that should give you any displeasure, and do all you require of me at a moment's bidding, even though it may have in it a great distastefulness."

"Marry, what infinite goodness!" cried the boy in a jeering manner. "Why, of what use art, if not to afford me some sport for the lack of better? Dost not know the difference betwixt a good-for-nothing beggarly brat, and a young gentleman of worship? and what so fit, I prythee, as that the one should be the pastime of the other."

"I would rather it should be in some other fashion, an' it please you;" observed Mabel very humbly. "I will roll the ball that you should strike it, and then to my utmost speed to bring it back to you again—I will be your horse, your spaniel, your deer; nay, ought in this world you most approve of, and do all that in me lies to pleasure you, so that you give me no more cruel blows with those uncivil stones."

"'Tis my humour, I tell thee;" sharply replied the petty tyrant. "And why should I be balked in my humour by so mean a person? Thou art

ever a crying out about thy hurts, forsooth ; and I doubt not at all thou art no more hurt than am I."

"Nay, and indeed, sweet Master Thomas——"

"Hold thy prate !" exclaimed he, picking up another missile, somewhat larger in size than what he had previously thrown, which he caught hold of because he would not wait to seek any smaller.

"See, I have got me a stone of some bigness, and if thou art not nimble, 'tis like thy crown will stand some chance of being cracked." The poor child cowed down as she saw him fling ; but the blow struck hard, for a slight scream escaped her involuntarily as she hastily put up her hands to her head.

"Hang thee, why didst not take heed as I told thee !" cried the unfeeling boy, searching about as if for another stone ; but it so happened that the cry of Mabel was heard by his parents, who turned back to see what caused it. The poor foundling was standing in exactly the same position as when she was struck.

"Ha ! what aileth thee, Mabel ?" shouted Sir Thomas, as he approached her. "Hast been stung by a bee ? Well, 'tis but a small matter. But never knew I a woman yet that could not cry out lustily at trifles ; nevertheless, received she any great damage that need not be told, she had the wit to hold her tongue, I warrant you."

"Fie, fie !" exclaimed the dame as usual, join-



ing in the knight's laugh; and then resuming her customary dignity swept forward to see if there was anything amiss. "Thou shouldst not cry out, child, upon slight causes;" added she, as she came close to the poor foundling. "Bees have stings; and, as is exceeding natural, they will use them when provoked to it, and perchance thou shalt be forced to bear the smart; but come thou with me, I have in my closet the sovereignest remedy—— Alack, what a sight is this!" cried the old lady in some amazement and alarm, as, in taking the child's arm, she noticed blood trickling through her fingers, and over her waving ringlets down to her back.

"O' my life, dame, methinks she hath sufficient cause for her crying," observed the knight. "But how came this about? Dost know ought of the matter, son Tom?" enquired he, as the boy came up to the spot.

"'Troth, father, I was flinging at a bird, and mayhap struck her by chance," said his son, as he noticed the mischief he had done.

"Plague on't, why dost not take more heed?" exclaimed his father.

"I am not much hurt, I thank you;" said Mabel, but so faintly as proved she was nigh upon swooning; and indeed, the blow had been so sharp it had stunned her for a time. "And Master Thomas meant not it should strike me."

"Thou shouldst not have got in his way, child!"

observed Dame Lucy very gravely. "But come with me—this wound must be looked to straight." And so saying, she led the fair child along to the house, making sage remarks all the way of the properness of little girls keeping away from places where any stones were being thrown.

"I marvel thou shouldst be so awkward, son Tom," said the knight, as he followed slowly behind the other two. "Now when I was of thy age none could match me at flinging at a mark. Many's the cock-sparrow I have knocked off his perch; nay, I have been so quick of eye as more than once, taking aim at a running leveret with a stone of less than an ounce weight, I have hit him between the ears, and tumbled him over as though he had been shot."

Thus this unmannerly boy escaped the punishment he deserved for his heartless mischief, and thus the four returned to the house, the dame intent upon dressing the child's wound, for she was famous in the knowledge of simples, and in small surgery, as all good huswives should be; and the knight rehearsing to his son what marvellous feats he had done in his boyhood with the flinging of stones. Close upon the entrance they were met by a serving man announcing the arrival of Master Buzzard, come to see his worship on business.

"How fare you Master Buzzard, how fare you?" cried Sir Thomas, welcoming his visitor in the old

hall, where he transacted justice business. "I must have your company to dinner, Master Buzzard, when my dame shall do you all proper courtesies." Then unheeding ought he had to say on the matter, the old knight gave instant orders that the horse of his guest should be well tended, and preparations made for as famous a dinner as the cook could provide. "Ha! hast got a falcon?" continued he. "I doubt not 'tis a brave bird by the look of it, Master Buzzard. Indeed, in my time, I have been as cunning in falconry as the best man living. I remember me I had a hawk of my own training that was the admiration of all the country, and lords and bishops and great courtiers came to beg that bird of me, but I would part with her on no account; she went at her quarry as no bird ever did—and all of my own training. And how fareth your noble kinsman?"

"Bravely, I thank you, Sir Thomas," replied Master Buzzard courteously; and then holding out the bird, added, "this hawk is accounted one of ten thousand, as I doubt not you shall find her on trial, so I pray you accept of her, Sir Thomas, for I have had her trained so that she should be worthy of belonging to so excellent fine a judge."

"Count me your debtor, Master Buzzard," said the knight, taking the gift very readily. "I shall be proud to do you any good service, believe me. By the mass, 'tis a brave bird! And so your noble

kinsman is well," continued he, as they sat together under a raised dais at the top of the hall. "I wonder if he hath forgot his old acquaintance Thomas Lucy—valiant Tom Lucy, as he was wont to call me, because once I got my head broke by a tinker for kissing of his wife. I remember me now, his good lordship laughed when the fellow offered to solder it for me for a groat, and put his irons in the fire for the purpose. That was a good jest i'faith."

"My lord often speaketh kindly of you, Sir Thomas," replied his guest, though he had never heard his kinsman mention the knight's name.

"O' my heart, doth he now!" exclaimed Sir Thomas delightedly. "Well, we have been sad boys together that's a sure thing—such coney-catchers—such roysterers—such lads of metal were not to be found in all Oxford. We kept the college in a roar, that did we with our tricks; and if any of the citizens so much as said us nay, we would out with our toasting irons and shew them how famously we could pass the montant, the punto, the reverso, and other signs of our cunning in fence, till they were glad enough to take to their heels with whole skins. We had not our match at the duello I promise you, and my lord was as choice a man at his weapon as might be met with in those days; as for me he would say I deserved to be fencer to the Czar of Muscovy, I was so quick at it, and that my nimbleness of motion made me as

difficult to be hit as a flea with a cannon ball ; odds my life, that was wittily said !”

“ In truth, a notable jest ;” said his guest joining in the justice’s laugh.

“ And so he wears well, doth he, Master Buz-zard ?” enquired the knight. “ I’m glad on’t—heartily glad on’t, for he was as true a jovial spirit as ever I have met with ; and I have known some mad fellows in my time, I warrant you. ’Troth, you would marvel famously to hear of what terrible wild doings I have been a party to in my younger days—a March hare was not so mad as was I—some called me Hector of Greece because of my valour—others the King of the Swing-bucklers, I was so ready to be a leader to the rest in any mischief. I was the terror of all the drawers round about, I would beat them so readily ; and the constables of the watch have oft been heard to say they would as lief meddle with a savage bear as lay a hand on me when I was in any of my wild humours. That is a fair hound of yours,” continued he, all at once noticing the dog his guest had brought with him. “ There are few so apt as am I in a proper knowledge of dogs. I can tell a good one on the instant. Indeed, I have been accounted as exquisite a judge in the breeding and breaking of them as could be found in the county ; and I have had in my time such dogs as could not be seen elsewhere. A fallow greyhound had I of a

most choice breed that beat all she run against. O' my life, I have won such wages on that dog's head as are clean incredible. But your's is a fair hound, Master Buzzard, take my word for't."

" 'Tis at your service, Sir Thomas—I brought her here with no other intent," replied the other.

" Nay, I cannot rob you of so fair a hound, Master Buzzard," said the justice, patting and commending the dog as she couched at her master's feet.

" You will do me wrong in denying me such a favour, Sir Thomas—so I pray you, take her," answered his guest.

" Nay, I should be loth to do any man wrong!" exclaimed the knight with great earnestness. " Methinks a justice of peace should be no wrong-doer—so I will e'en accept of your hound, and thank you very heartily. Is there ought in which my poor ability may do you a service, Master Buzzard?"

" There is a matter I have come upon, to the which I should like to have your worship's countenance," began his companion with a famous hypocritical serious face.

" Count upon it, Master Buzzard!" cried the justice. " Believe me, I would strain a point for you with great willingness, that would I, as I will shew at any time there is good warrant for it."

" I am much bound to you, Sir Thomas," replied

the other; "then this is it. There is one John Shakspeare——"

"What, he of Stratford?" inquired the knight quickly. "A man of a fair round face, who married Arden's daughter. I have heard him well spoke of by divers of the burgesses as passing honest, and at your instigation, Master Buzzard, I will countenance him against any man."

"You have been hugely deceived in him, Sir Thomas," observed his guest very gravely.

"Marry, would he seek to deceive a justice of peace!" exclaimed the other. "What monstrous villainy!"

"I have heard him speak most abominable slanders of your worship," continued Master Buzzard.

"Oh, the horrid caitiff!" cried the offended justice. "Nay, but 'tis actionable, Master Buzzard; and I will have him cast in swinging damages. O' my life, never heard I so infamous a thing! I will straightway issue my warrant for his apprehension. I will teach him to slander Sir Thomas Lucy, knight o' the shire and justice o' the peace, I warrant you! 'Tis not fit such villains should live; and methinks 'twould be exceeding proper in the law could so heinous an offence be brought in hanging."

"As I live, I am of your worship's opinion!" said his guest. "But he is a very pestilent knave,

this John Shakspeare, and one of no manner of honesty whatever, as I can presently prove; for some time since, at his urgent pressing, believing him to be such creditable person as your worship thought, I lent him a hundred crowns on his bond, the which he hath not paid to this day, putting me off with all sorts of paltry excuses concerning of what losses he had had; but knowing, by certain intelligence, he was merely striving to get off payment, I have instructed Master Catchpole to proceed against him, and seize what he hath for the payment of my just debt."

"I warrant you," observed the knight, "never heard I such thorough dishonesty. What, borrow a hundred crowns at his need, and at a proper time be not able to pay it back! O' my life, 'tis clean villainy!"

"Perchance I should not have been so rigorous with him, had I not heard him give your worship such ill words," added Master Buzzard; "for I care not so much for losing of such a sum; but I could not allow of one who slandered so noble a gentleman going unpunished."

"By'r lady, Master Buzzard, I am greatly beholden to you!" exclaimed the justice; "but I will trounce him famously—ay, that will I!—and keep his unruly tongue from all such lewd behaviour for ever after."

"Nay, if it please you, Sir Thomas, I would he



should not be attacked in this matter," said Master Buzzard. "The burgesses might take it ill of me, he being one of the corporation, and of some influence amongst them, were I to seem to press him too hard. So I should take it kindly if you would make no stir in it; but keep you your eye upon him, and if he should be found transgressing, as it is very like he will, then, if it so please you, I shall be well content you punish him as your wisdom may think fittest."

It is only necessary to add to what hath just been set down, that Master Buzzard stayed dinner with Sir Thomas Lucy, and was well entertained of him and his lady, ever laughing at the knight's jests, and marvelling at his incredible narrations, but never failing to say something now and then which should strengthen the other's misliking of John Shakspeare, which failed not of its purpose; for the justice was so weak of conceit as to be easily enraged against any who seemed not to think of him so famously as was evident he thought of himself.

## CHAPTER VIII.

It is decreed: and we must yield to fate,  
 Whose angry justice, though it threatens ruin,  
 Contempt and poverty, is all but trial  
 Of a weak woman's constancy in suffering.

FORD.

In felawship well could she laugh and carpe;  
 She was a worthy woman all hire live,  
 Housbondes at the chirche dore had she had five.

CHAUCER.

I exact not from you  
 A fortitude insensible of calamity,  
 To which the saints themselves have bowed, and shown  
 They are made of flesh and blood; all that I challenge  
 Is manly patience.

MASSINGER.

Hold out now,  
 And then thou art victorious.

FORD.

Two persons were standing in an empty chamber, bare to the very boards. A painful seriousness was on the features of each; but there was no doubting each strove to conceal from the other the exact state of their feelings. They spoke low; their voices having that subdued sound which betokeneth great excitement of mind, with great efforts to keep it from others' knowledge. One, a man seeming to be of the middle age, and in the prime of manhood, leaned his elbow on the window cell, with his forehead resting on his palm; the

other, a woman of an admirable matronly appearance, had her arm around his waist, and her fair cheek resting upon his shoulder. These were John Shakspeare and his wife. They spoke only at intervals, in the manner described; and, as usual in all troubles, the woman appeared to be playing the part of the comforter.

“Take it not to heart, John, I pray you,” said she, as she seemed to press him closer to her side. “We shall do bravely anon. We must put up with these buffets as we best may; and, for mine own part, I can content myself wondrous well, be my condition ever so humble.”

“I doubt it not, dame,” replied her husband; “but canst content thyself with bare lying, naked walls, and an empty larder?”

“Ay, dear heart!” answered she very readily; “for a longer space than they are like to visit us. We may be considered as poor as any that live; but whilst I have for my yoke-fellow a good husband, a tender father, and one so industriously disposed withal, as you have oft shown yourself to be, I know of no poverty that could trouble me a jot.”

“But the children, dame,” observed John Shakspeare in a huskish sort of voice. “Alack! alack! what shall become of them?”

“O they will do well enough, I warrant you!” replied his wife with a cheerfulness she was far from

feeling. "They can endure some slight discomfort, or they are none of mine, more especially when they take heed of their loving father's brave exertions to keep up his heart, and make head against this sudden adversity."

"I am bewildered what to set my hand to," said he, rising from his position with a countenance somewhat irresolute; "but when I look upon my stripped dwelling, and remember how delicately thou hast been brought up——"

"Tut, tut, dear heart!" exclaimed his good dame, taking one of his hands in hers, and gazing affectionately in his face; "I should scorn myself could I not bear the ills that might visit my help-mate. Think not of me, I pray you, for there liveth not in the world one so hardy as am I in all such matters." John Shakspeare shook his head mournfully as he looked on her pale face, as though he had his doubts she was as strong as she said.

"I will essay all that a man can," said he at last, "in the express hope this change of fortune will do thee no hurt, for thou hast been an excellent good wife to me, dame; and 'twould go to my heart were any evil to happen to thee." At this commendation she said never a word; but all the woman was in her eyes presently, and she suddenly threw her arms around his neck, and laid her face on his bosom.

"Woe's me, what poor foolishness is this?" cried

she, rising from him a minute after, with an endeavour to look more cheerful; "but I am wonderful pleased you will try to be doing of something, and I care not what it be so that it keep sad thoughts from your head: nay, I am assured of it, you shall live prosperously the rest of your days, put you forth all your strength now to bear these troubles."

"That will I without fail, sweet heart," cried he. After a brief space he left the chamber.

Dame Shakspeare when alone, felt the whole weight of her misfortune, for she had given such great heaps of comfort to her husband, she had not a bit of ever such smallness remaining for herself. She leaned out of the empty casement, but of the spring flowers blooming in the garden saw she nothing; she beheld only her hapless partner and her poor innocent children lacking those comforts they had been used to, and she powerless as to helping them in their need. The wife and the mother was so moved at the picture she could not avoid drawing, as to feel a sort of choking, and such heaviness of heart, that at last she dropped her face upon her hands and there smothered her sobs. All at once she caught the sound of a very sweet singing, and listening with what attention she could, heard the following words.

## A COMFORTABLE CAROL.

“ Cheer thee, my heart ! Thy life shall have a crowning  
This poor apparelling cannot beguile ;  
Phœbus himself hath worn as dark a frowning,  
And lo ! all Heaven is radiant with his smile !  
Bravely thy spirit bear,  
Far from each coward fear ;  
What though some trouble come, is all joy banished ?  
Prythee a lesson read,  
In ev’ry shiv’ring weed,  
That knows in winter’s rage springs have not vanished.  
Pleasure is born of thee, comfort is near thee,  
Glory thy boon shall be—Cheer thee, O cheer thee !

Cheer thee, my heart ! Heed not the present sorrow,  
Let future gladness flash in ev’ry thought ;  
Never a night so black but hath its morrow,  
Whose splendour laughs all gloominess to nought.  
Though thou shouldst feel the wound,  
’Tis but to plough the ground—  
Looks not the soil as barren in the furrow ?  
Yet o’er these sightless clods,  
Countless great plenty nods,  
When the rich harvest clothes the wide field thorough !  
Pleasure is born of thee, comfort is near thee,  
Glory thy boon shall be—Cheer thee, O cheer thee ! ”

It was Nurse Cicely singing to the children in an upper chamber, as was her wont. It had been noted, that however much given to singing was she, she never sang any such songs as were familiar to her hearers ; but she would say when spoke to on the matter, she had learned them in her youth, and

knew not by whom they were writ. It was the marvel of many, that they looked to be of a higher language than ordinary ballads, whereof the tunes were the delicatest sort ever heard. Dame Shakspeare felt exceeding comforted at hearing the foregoing verses, and rising from her leaning place, hastily brushed away a tear from her eyelids, as though it was some base rebel that would needs be in arms against her authority. As she did this she was suddenly aware of a great talking of voices in what had been the warehouse, and her chamber door being presently thrown open, she beheld the whole place thronged with her neighbours, mostly women and children, carrying spare tables and chairs, and other such conveniences as they thought she stood most in need of.

“This way, neighbours, this way!” exclaimed the merry Widow Pippins, who seemed to be the leader of the party.

“Ha! dame, how dost do?” enquired she, as she put an old arm chair by the side of her. “So the villains have not left thee so much as a rush for thy floor! But mind it not, gossip, for they have given thee all the better cause for caring not a rush for the whole pack of them.” Thereupon she had a hearty laugh, and then bustled herself about, giving directions where to put things, which all did with great alacrity, that presently there seemed some sort of comfort in the chamber, albeit though

no two chairs were alike. Mistress Malmsey and Mistress Dowlas were each at the side of Dame Shakspeare, for she was more overpowered by the kindness of her neighbours than ever she had been at the great reverse she had just experienced; and they two having got her seated, were pressing of her to take some wine the vintner's wife had brought with her, and were bestowing on her all sorts of friendly consolation.

“ Now, get you gone, all of you, and let us see which hath the best pair of heels,” said the widow, in her cheerfulest humour, to the others. “ Mayhap, if you search thoroughly, you shall still find some odd thing or another serviceable to our good neighbour; and methinks ’twould be infamous of any who have wherewithal to spare, to keep it from one who is in such need.”

“ Ay, that would it,” said David Hurdle, who had run from his work on the news of John Shakspeare's misfortune, with a heavy oak table nigh as much as he could carry.

“ Methinks I have a knife or two, and mayhap a spare trencher,” observed Mother Flytrap. “ But, alack ! what a monstrous shame was it to have been so hard upon so sweet a woman. Odds codlings ! I could find it in my heart to do them a mischief for’t.”

“ Use thy legs briskly, and thy tongue shall last the longer,” exclaimed the Widow Pippins, merrily.



“That will I, I warrant you!” replied the old woman, hobbling along with her stick at a rate she had not attempted for many a day.

“As I live, the world groweth more villainous every hour!” cried Oliver Dumps, putting on one of his dolefullest faces. “What abominable uncivilness and horrible tyranny is this—what shameful usage and intolerable cruelty!”

“Fine words butter no parsnips, Master Constable,” said the widow. “Hast brought any useful thing for our good neighbour?”

“Nay, I clean forgot,” answered Oliver.

“Speed thee, then, and give handsomely,” exclaimed she. “What dost come here for, with thy melancholy visage, like that of a frog in a long drought? Get thee gone for a good dozen of trenchers, else if ever I draw thee a drop of my liquor again, call me a horse. And, prythee,” added the merry woman, as he was moving himself off, “strive if thou canst not find a good store of wholesome victual to put in them; and count on brimming measure from me the rest of thy life.”

“How now, sweetheart,” cried she, when there were no others left with Dame Shakspeare save only herself, Mistress Malmsey, and Mistress Dowlas, “be not so downcast. By my patience, there is nought in this you should so much care for. Look at me, who have buried five husbands—seem I in any way woe-begone? O’ my life, no! Perchance

I should seem none the less satisfied had I buried a hundred, for there would still be plenty as good above ground, or I am hugely mistaken. Troth, care and I have never been bedfellows, that's a sure thing."

"An' it please you, dame, I will take the boy William to our house till things are more settled than they now are," observed the draper's wife.

"And I will move my Timothy to be a mean for setting your good man on his legs again," said the other, as affectionately.

"I heartily thank you," was all Dame Shakspeare could say in reply.

"Prythee look a little more cheerful," cried the widow. "Smile a bit now—'twould do you wonderful good, I warrant; and a famous burst of laughing would be worth any money to you."

Their attention was, at this moment, attracted by some loud talking in the adjoining chamber or warehouse, which proved to be Master Buzzard's man, Saul, conducting of himself with intolerable insolency towards John Shakspeare, evidently with a view of provoking him to some breach of the peace.

"Humph!" exclaimed he, carelessly beating of his boot with an ashen stick he had with him, as he stared about the naked chamber with exceeding impudence, "methinks thy wits must needs take to wool-gathering, to help thee to a new stock, else

must thy customers lack serving, for here is as goodly a shew of nothing as ever I saw."

"Get thee gone, fellow!" observed John Shakspeare, with that indifference an honest man ever feels at the insults of a low villain.

"Fellow!" cried Saul, sharply, "who dost call fellow, I prythee? I have a few pounds, at least, stored up, with a something in my purse to spend; but that thou art worth a pinch of salt with all thou hast, is more than I can see any colour of warrant for thinking. Marry, I marvel to hear beggars give their betters ill words."

"Wilt get thee gone?" cried the other, in a louder key; "what dost want here? Say thy business, and be off."

"Business, quotha!" exclaimed the man, with a sneering laugh, "O' my life, this be a rare place for business. What hast got to sell, John Shakspeare—spiders' webs? I'faith, 'tis like thou wilt drive a brave trade anon, provided thou canst keep up a fair demand for such merchandise."

"O' my word, if thou dost not take thyself quietly out of my dwelling in a presently, I will turn thee out," said John Shakspeare, determinedly.

"Ha, indeed," replied the fellow, twirling his stick about, and eyeing his companion superciliously from head to foot, "an' I be not hugely mistaken, 'twould take a somewhat better man than thou art, to do any such thing."

"Away, fellow! thou art contemptible," exclaimed the other, making great efforts to withhold his anger; "an' I were but half as vile a wretch as thou, I would take me a rope and hang myself without another word."

"How darest thou call names, thou pitiful, beggarly wretch!" cried Saul, approaching his companion with a savage menacing look. "Dost think to play the high bailiff again? 'Slife! hear I any more of thy bouncing speech, I'll crack thy crown for thee."

"Wouldst!" exclaimed John Shakspeare, seizing the fellow so suddenly by the collar of his jerkin, that he had no time for putting of his threat in execution. "Wouldst, caitiff!" continued he, shaking him in his strong grasp till he appeared to have shook all his breath away. Then drawing him close to his breast, he thrust his insulter from him with such force, that he sent him reeling to the other end of the chamber, saying, "Get thee gone for a villain!"

As soon as the man got his footing he was for flying at the other in a horrible deadly rage, to do him some mischief, when he was stopped by the Widow Pippins, Mistress Malmsey, and Mistress Dowlas, rushing in before him from out of the adjoining chamber.

"Away, thou scurvy rogue!" exclaimed the widow.

“Get thee hence, thou pitiful rascal, or I will clout thy head off!” cried the vintner’s wife, with no less earnestness.

“By my troth, an’ thou stayest here another minute, I’ll be as good as hanging to thee, thou intolerable villain!” added Mistress Dowlas, in as great a rage as either.

“Go to, thou art a drab!” said Saul, impatiently, as he tried to push by them.

“Am I a drab, fellow?” exclaimed Mistress Malmsey, hitting of him a box on the ear with all the strength of her arm.

“Dost call me drab, villain!” cried the draper’s wife, giving him so sore a one on the other side of his head that it nearly turned him round.

“I’ll drab thee!” said the widow, lifting up her foot the next moment, and giving him a kick behind of such force it sent him some paces; and the three women followed him up with such vigour, that after standing a moment, quite bewildered with the quickness and fierceness of their blows, the fellow was fain to take to his heels: but not before the widow had given him a parting benediction with her foot in the use of which she shewed a marvellous cleverness—that gave him a good start to begin with.

“As I live that was well done of us!” exclaimed the merry widow, as soon as Saul had disappeared, and laughing with her usual free-heartedness; “never knew I so goodly a foot-ball, or ever played

so famous a game. Indeed, 'twas exquisite sport. I would not have missed my share in it for another husband. O' my life, an' he findeth himself comfortable sitting for the next month, he must be rarely fashioned. He must needs forswear chairs, and rest as gingerly on a stool as would a cow upon broken bottles. I'faith, 'twas rare sport !”

The other two appeared to be nearly as well amused, as they returned to Dame Shakspeare, who had come as far as the door in some alarm, when her neighbours burst into the warehouse ; but there were two others, who had observed Saul's insolence from the kitchen, and these were Maud and Humphrey, and were quite as much moved at it as any there. The former had been crying ever since the seizure, and the other had been endeavouring, with a vast shew of awkward affectionateness, to give her some comfort.

“ Humphrey !” cried she, suddenly jumping up from the ground where she had been sitting, at hearing of her master so insulted, and gazing on her companion with a very monstrous earnestness ; “ An' thou dost not go and cudgel that knave within an inch of his life, I'll forswear thy company. Ay,” added she, with a most moving emphasis ; “ though I die a maid for't !”

“ By goles, thou shalt never do so horrid a thing !” exclaimed Humphrey, hastily catching hold of a cudgel that had often done good service on

himself, and darting out at the back door as Saul made his exit at the front. Now Humphrey was not much given to valour: indeed, to speak the exact truth, he could be terrible fearful upon occasions; but what will not love do? All at once Humphrey felt himself a hero; and to save his Maud from so unnatural a catastrophe as she had threatened, he would that moment have dared any danger, had it been ever so great. As he proceeded quickly along, he threw out his arms, jerked up his head, expanded his chest, and flourished his cudgel, with the air of a conqueror. No one knew Humphrey. I doubt hugely Humphrey knew himself, he was so changed.

Saul left John Shakspeare's house in a terrible bad humour, as may be supposed. His head seemed to spin like a parish top, and as for—but methinks the courteous reader needeth no retrospective allusions. Suffice it to say he was in a tearing passion, and went his way monstrous chap-fallen, muttering all sorts of imprecations, with his eyes on the ground as though intent on studying every pebble he trod on. All at once some one ran against him with such force as nearly to send him off his legs.

“A murrain on thee! dost want thy fool's head broke?” shouted Saul.

“Ay, marry, and why not, if thou canst do it!” replied Humphrey in a big voice that almost

frightened himself. "Go and bite thy thumb at a stone wall, and be hanged to thee! My head be as good a fool's head as thine, I warrant; and I care not who knows it. I tell thee I take thee to be a scurvy villain; so have it in thy teeth, thou coal-carrying knave!"

"Bravely said, Humphrey!" cried a neighbour, astonished at such a display in one so little noted for valour.

"Well done, my heart of oak!" exclaimed another, patting him on the back with the same commending spirit.

"Why, thou pitiful worsted knave!" bawled out Master Buzzard's man, recovering from his surprise at being so abused of so mean a person. "'Slife! an' I do not beat thee to shavings, I am a Jew."

"A ring, my masters—a ring!" bawled out another; and very speedily there was a circle of some twenty men and boys, formed round the two combatants. Never were two persons so badly matched. Saul was the best cudgel-player in the whole country; but all Humphrey's knowledge of it came of the blows he had had of his master, and not without deserving it; yet was Humphrey the favorite of the spectators beyond question, all of whom held the other in huge dislike, for very efficient causes, and Humphrey was so encouraged and commended of them, that although his feelings



were somewhat of a dubious sort, for all the shew he made, it kept up his valour famously. Presently the two began playing of their weapons very prettily; but Humphrey was in so monstrous an eagerness to pay his antagonist, he did nothing but strike away as hard as he could, in a manner that quite confused the practised cudgel-player. Saul was in a horrible passion, which, in conjunction with other things, mayhap might have made his skill avail him so little; but when he found his head broke, and heard the shouts of triumph of those around him, he became like a mad beast, and struck out wherever he could at mere random. Certes Humphrey got no lack of thumps; but his head looked to be of the hardness of a bullet, and gave no sign of being touched, while Saul could scarce see out of his eyes for the blood running from his broken head.

As it was now a mere trial of endurance it was easy to see who would get the best of it, for Saul might have cudgelled a post with as much sign of success as he had with his present antagonist; and nothing could exceed the gratification of all present at the heartiness with which John Shakspeare's man gave it the other. In short, Saul got such a drubbing as he had never had since he was born; and at last, when his strength was nearly exhausted, a sharp blow sent him to the ground like a stone. Then rose a shout of triumph such as Stratford

had rarely heard, and Humphrey mounted on the shoulders of two butchers apprentices, and followed by half the town hurraing him as he went—they were in such delight he had behaved himself so valorously, and punished as he deserved so notorious a knave—was carried like a hero to his master's dwelling.

“Maud!” cried the victor, as he entered the back door, with his heart swelling with exultation.

“Well, Humphrey,” said she.

“I have given that varlet his deserts.”

“Hast?” added she, approaching him closely, and looking earnestly into his face.

“By goles, I do think I have gone as nigh killing the knave as was possible.”

“Hast?” repeated she with a smile breaking over her chubby cheeks. “Then here's at thee!” Thereupon she suddenly seized Humphrey by his two ears with her huge fists, and gave him as hearty a buss as ever man received of woman since the world commenced.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Mosca.* There's nought impossible.

*Volpone.* Yes, to be learned, *Mosca.*

*Mosca.* O no; rich

Implies it. Hood an ass with reverend purple,  
So you can hide his two ambitious ears,  
And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor.

BEN JONSON.

Withouten bake mete never was his hous,  
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous,  
It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke,  
Of all deinties that men coud thinke,  
After the sondry sesons of the yere.

CHAUCER.

Of an old English gentleman who had an old estate,  
And kept up his old mansion at a bountiful rate,  
With an old porter to relieve the poor at his gate,  
Like the Queen's old courtier, and a courtier of the Queen's.

OLD BALLAD.

It cannot be supposed William Shakspeare was well off in his schooling under so ill a master as Stripes, who, though he did not treat him uncivilly, in token of such welcome gifts as his mother oftentimes brought, was of too ignorant pedantic a nature to have that heed which a young scholar of any promise requireth: nevertheless William took to his book very kindly, to the wonderful admiration of Dame Shakspeare and her gossips, and in especial of Nurse Cicely, which never failed to bring forth notable prophecies of his future greatness from her, whereof

more than one person entertained them as exceeding credible. There was no wake, or lamb-ale, or other festival in the neighbourhood the boy was not invited to with his mother, at which he was continually called upon to repeat such verses he had learned of his mother, or sing such ballads as his nurse had made him familiar with; and the goodly manner he would perform what was required, so won upon the hearts of the spectators, that praises out of all number, and other things more substantial in great plenty, were the sure consequences. As soon as he had learned to read, wonderful was the diligence with which he perused all manner of books—albeit he quickly exhausted the poor stock that could be had for his reading, for these merely consisted of a few volumes, chiefly poems of Dame Shakspeare's, and one or two here and there of some neighbour. Certes, no great matter of knowledge was to be gained of such books; but they served to excite the young mind, and keep it in a restless yearning for more delectable food; and therefore were not entirely unprofitable.

It is not to be imagined that a child so disposed took no delight in the proper pastimes of his age; for the entire contrary is nighest to the truth. Among all his schoolfellows who entered into any sport with such absolute zest as Will Shakspeare? He was the wildest of any. His free spirit made such play among them as soon gained for him the liking of

the whole school. He grew up at last to be the chief leader in their games—the captain of their exploits, and the very heart and principle of all their revels. If Will was not of their company, doubtless were they as much at a loss as a hive of bees without their queen; but when they were heard as merry as crickets by a winter's hearth, calling lustily to each other, crowding here and running there, sending the football bounding along the grass, or leaping over each other's backs as though they had wings, of a surety he was to be found amongst the very foremost. But it should be borne in mind that there were times, and many times too, when the day was in its freshest glory, and every one of his companions were enjoying themselves to his heart's content, he would be in some out of the way corner, half sitting half reclining on the floor, leaning deeply studious over some old volume he had provided himself with; and the merry shoutings close at hand, or the pressing entreaties of those he most liked, had never power to draw him thence till he had gone through it every page.

More than once too, when they were out together a maying, or nutting in the woods, he would stray from the rest, perchance led away by the sweet singing of the birds, or the delicate beauty of the blossoms; and in some shady place would sit him down to rest, conning of a book the whilst, he had carried under his jerkin, till somehow or another he

would fall asleep,—and O the exquisite pleasant dreams he had at that time ! At the end he would suddenly start up, rubbing of his eyes and looking in every place for the great multitude of the fairy folk, who a moment since in their delicate finery seemed to be dancing so bravely before him, and singing to him such admirable choice ditties, and doing him all manner of delectable courtesies ; but finding no sign of such searched he ever so, he would be in huge disappointment, till the shouting of his fellows woke him from his strange bewilderment ; and he would then make what haste he could to rejoin his company.

Of his disposition, it is not too much to say it savoured of as much sweetness as ever laid in so little a compass. There was no aptness to sudden quarrel with him—no giving of ill words—no beating of lesser boys than himself—no tendency to mere rude mischief ; neither selfishness, nor covetousness, nor revengefulness, nor any unmannerly quality whatsoever, such as are frequent in other boys ; but he would give freely of what he had, and assist those in their tasks who were backward, and very cheerfully do any civil thing for another that was in his compass, and could not bear to see any cruelty, or tyranny, or unkind treatment of any sort, let it be among big or little. From this it will readily be conceived that for his master he had but small affection, even though Stripes used him with

more civilness than was his wont to others. This seeming partiality, however, lasted only as long as Dame Shakspeare's gifts; for when the family grew to be too poorly off to send him any, the school-master shewed his savage humour to him as much as to the rest.

At the complete poverty of his father by Master Buzzard's ruthless proceedings, it was thought William would be taken altogether from school to assist his parents in such things as he could, for he was now grown to be of some bigness, and John Shakspeare had not withal to keep either Maud or Humphrey—who straightway made themselves of the pale of matrimony—and was striving as he best might to do a little trade as a glover, whereof his means, with his neighbours assistance, was only enough to accomplish; but it was resolved by the two aldermen's wives, who were the prime movers of all things in his behalf, that it would be best, as he was getting so forward, William should keep school hours, and assist his father at other times; and in consequence, he continued to receive such instructions as Stripes could give in reading and writing, the science of simple arithmetic, and the study of the Latin grammar, for some time longer, wherein he got to be the very head of the school, despite of having so unworthy a teacher, and of the monstrous negligence and wanton insolency with which he was treated.

Now, this fellow of a schoolmaster was in the habit of using his boy Dickon, worse than any turnspit dog might be treated by a brutal scullion. What his wages were has never been known; and indeed, save in the way of blows, he never had anything of the sort. He got such little victual, that it was supposed of some he would long since have taken to eating of himself, only he knew not where to find a mouthful. Truly, flesh and blood could not stand such usage; indeed, it appeared as though they had long had nought to do with the business, leaving skin and bone to manage every thing between them. Dickon was reduced to such a strait, that if he caught sight of a cur looking for bones, he would take to his heels presently, with the full conviction the animal would make a grab at him and he got in his way. In him, however, such leanness was but the natural result of poor living; but his master, though he eat and drank greedily whatever he could lay his hand on, looked not a jot more full of flesh than ordinary. Indeed, he starved both his boy and his cat, eating from them their share of victual, yet seemed to carry nigh upon as hungry a look with him as either. His tyrannical humour he often enough shewed upon his scholars, but this was nothing to be compared with the savageness with which he was ever falling upon poor Dickon for any trifling faults; and it was his custom, when he fancied there was anything amiss in the poor



boy's behaviour, to drag him into the school-room, to be horsed by the biggest of his scholars ; and then he would lay on him with a great rod, with such fierceness as was horrible to see, caring not a jot for his cries, or the entreaties of the whole school he should be let go.

These exhibitions of his master's cruelty were intolerable to William Shakspeare, and many of his schoolfellows ; so one day, after such a sight, he got several of them together he had confidence in, and they being moved with wrath and indignation, resolved amongst themselves they would allow of it no longer, no matter what might follow ; and the first class, which were the chiefest for strength, entered into a bond of mutual protection. Others of the greatest spirit were drawn into the confederacy, and in a little time the whole school was in a ferment upon the matter. The very smallest of the lot was seen to double up his little first, with a look of vengeance that spoke volumes of meaning. All things, however, were left to the management of Will Shakspeare, and every one vowed to stand by him, though they were whacked to ribbons. The secret was well kept. Stripes had not the slightest knowledge of any such feeling against him, and the next day rushed into the school-room, hawling in Dickon by the ear, who was making of a pitiful lamentation, and cuffing him mercilessly by the way.

“ Will Shakspeare !” shouted the schoolmaster ;  
“ horse me this villain straight.” The boy moved  
not an inch.

“ Will Shakspeare, I say !” thundered Stripes,  
with increased rage ; “ horse me this caitiff, I tell  
thee.” Still his scholar kept the same unmoved-  
ness, and every one appeared studying of their  
tasks with more than ordinary diligence, neverthe-  
less their little hearts were a beating famously.

“ Why, thou villain, what dost mean by this ?” ex-  
claimed the pedagogue, furiously, letting go his  
hold of Dickon, and catching up his cane. “ I’ll  
make thee hear, I warrant.” In the twinkling of  
an eye every boy was out of his form.

“ Now, Tom Greene !” cried one.

“ Now, Jack Hemings !” shouted another.

“ At him, Dick Burbage !” exclaimed a third.

“ On him, Harry Condell !” bawled a fourth ;  
and, in an instant, there was a rush upon the  
astonished schoolmaster from all parts of the school.

“ Ha ! dost rebel ?” screamed he, making furi-  
ous efforts to cut them with his cane, with his  
cadaverous visage livid with passion. “ ’Slight, I’ll  
make thee rue it !”

But for all his terrible efforts he was speedily  
overpowered. The boys came upon him with all  
the spirit of ants disturbed in their nest ; some  
clung to a leg, others to an arm. They jumped  
upon his neck, and hung upon his jerkin in such

numbers, that he could do nought in the world but threaten them with the horriblest imprecations. At this stage of the proceedings, Dickon, who had regarded this sudden movement out of his wits with sheer amazement, was called to hold his back to take his master on ; and though at first he shewed some sign of unwillingness, he was soon forced by the conspirators to do as they bade him.

“ I’ll have thee hanged, villains !” bawled the pedagogue, as he was being hoisted by the strongest of his scholars upon the back of the poor boy he had used so inhumanly, malgre all his strugglings and fumings. “ I’ll lash the skin off thy pestilent bones ! I’ll scourge every one of thee to death. Let me go, thou vile wretches !”

“ Hold on, Dickon !” cried some.

“ Keep him fast, my masters !” exclaimed others, and shouts of encouragement arose from all. Dickon did hold fast, doubtless in some slight pleasure, for all his seeming unwillingness, and he had no lack of helpers in his office ; so that Stripes was very speedily prepared for that punishment he had with so little discretion inflicted upon others. As soon as he began to be aware of what was intended for him, he was like one in a phrenzy. Mad with fear, rage, and indignation, he redoubled his threats and his struggles, but all to small profit ; for, whilst he was held down as firm as in a vice by some, others, one after another, laid into him with all their might

till he roared for mercy. These, then, taking the places of his holders, divers in their turn assisted in the tyrant's punishment, till not one of the whole school but had repaid him with interest the undeserved blows he had received at his hands. To describe the joy with which all this was done by the scholars, their uproarious shouts and cheers, or the horrible bad humour of their master, is clean out of the question. I doubt not it will be imagined of many. The end was, at a signal he was dropped on the floor, so completely tamed of his tyrannical humours, he would not have struck at a mouse,—where he was left to put himself to rights as he might,—and then the whole school took their leaves of him very orderly.

The next day they came to school as usual, but all in a body; the bigger boys first, and the little ones coming after, and every one went to his place, and took to his studies, as if nothing had happened out of the ordinary. Doubtless, they had come to a resolution to have at him again, shewed he any more of his insufferable cruelties; but there was small need of any such a thing, for there was never so altered a man seen as was Stripes, the schoolmaster. He heard them their lessons with a sort of suavity that was marvellous beyond all things—praising of every one as though he had got for his scholars such prodigies of genius as could not be met with elsewhere—and taking no more thought of canes and

rods, than if such things had never been in his experience. As for Dickon, he shewed his master a fair pair of heels directly he had him off his back, and was shortly after taken into the service of an honest yeoman, father to one of the scholars.

It so happened, once on a time, as William Shakspeare and his chief companions were strolling together, they came upon the town crier giving note to the inhabitants, that my Lord of Leicester's players being in the town, would perform a play at a certain hour, to the which the citizens were invited at a small charge. This put some of them in a monstrous desire to behold so goodly an entertainment—particularly William Shakspeare, who had beheld nought of the kind in all his life; but others, his elders, had seen plays more than once, and they gave him such moving accounts of what exquisite pleasant pastime was to be found in them, that he did nothing but wish he could get to a sight of such. Unluckily, he had no money of any kind; and his father's necessities were so great he knew none could be spared him. What to do he knew not; for though he could get standing room for a penny, no sign of a penny could he see anywhere. He knew that divers of his schoolfellows were intent upon going, and he would have been glad enough to have joined them, but he saw no hope of the kind, by reason of wanting the necessary price of admission. It however did so turn out, that the father of one of the

boys was an especial acquaintance of the head of the players, by which means Richard Burbage not only got to see the play for nothing, but moved his father to allow of his schoolfellow, Will Shakspeare, having the like permission; which, to the latter's extreme comfort, was granted.

The players gave their entertainment in the inn yard of the Widow Pippins, on a raised platform in front of the gallery. They were not troubled with scenery, and made no particuler display of a wardrobe, but the merry interlude, called "Gammer Gurton's Needle," a huge favourite at that time, which was then and there played by them, required little such accompaniment. The spectators, at least the greater number, stood in the yard; but those who chose to pay more, were accommodated with seats at the gallery and casements. William Shakspeare, by going early with his fellows, got a front place, and waited, in a marvellous eagerness, to see the interlude. Presently there was a movement made by his neighbours, which caused him to turn round like the rest, and he saw it was occasioned by the entrance into the gallery of Sir Thomas Lucy, his lady, and his son, who took the best places; elsewhere were seen Mistress Malmsey and Mistress Dowlas, in their choicest finery, pointing out their acquaintances to each other; and either up or down, half the good folks of Stratford might

have been recognised, intent upon nothing so much as seeing the play.

At last the curtain was moved, and a beginning was made of the play by the appearance of Hodge and Deacon. The pitiful manner in which the one complains to the other of the bad state of his lower garment, and the right doleful way of his companion's condolences on the matter, were received by the audience with loud roars of laughter. Then, when Deacon acquaints Hodge of Gammer Gurton and her maid Tib having been by the ears together, making of the house a perfect Bedlam, and the other protests he was monstrous afraid something serious would happen, having taken note of the awful manner in which Tom Tankard's cow frisked her tail, there was no less mirthfulness. Upon Hodge proceeding homewards and meeting with Tib, and hearing that all this turmoil has been occasioned by the Gammer losing of her needle; when upon spying of Gib, the cat, up to the ears in her milk-bowl, she let fall his breeches she was clouting with all diligence, the humour of the dialogue seemed equally well relished. But when it came to Gammer Gurton's terrible to do because of her loss, her monstrous anxiousness to recover it, her suspicions of the honesty of her neighbours, her intrigues and quarrels with them, and the interference of no less a person than the parson of the parish, Dr. Rat, to

make peace again, there was choice roaring, I warrant you; and this was only exceeded when Hodge, upon sitting of himself down, discovered the lost needle, to his great smart, in consequence of its having been left sticking in his rent garment.

I doubt much whether the finest play ever writ, was so well relished of an audience as was this rude coarse interlude, of the simple burgesses of Stratford. Even Sir Thomas Lucy laughed as though he would never have done. As for William Shakspeare, it made such impression on him, never having seen any thing of the sort, that the next day, and very often after, he was to be seen, with his companions Burbage, Greene, Condell, and Hemings, making players of themselves in an out-of-the-way corner of the town, essaying to play that very interlude, by one taking one character, and the rest others; and it was said by some who saw them at it, that the seeing of these boys aping the players out of their own heads, as they did, was nigh upon as rare a sight as seeing the players themselves. All these five were ever at it; and the playing of Gammer Gurton's Needle took the place of all other sports whatsoever. Suffice it to say, that the Earl of Leicester's company got such reception, they repeated their visits frequently; and young Burbage's father having shewn some talent as a player, they took him to be of their company.

On one occasion, William Shakspeare was sent



with some gloves to a certain Sir Marmaduke de Largesse, living at Wilnecott, at an excellent old mansion there, who delighted in keeping up the country sports and festivals, and was noted for miles round, what extreme pleasure he took in any thing that smacked of antiquity. His hospitality was unbounded, and his table was ever loaded with the choicest of good victual, to which all might seat themselves according to their quality; and what was left was given to the poor by the porter at the gate. No one ever came there hungry that did not leave with as much as he liked to eat and drink, under his belt; and, if it was needed, a something in his purse to carry him along. In his cooking he was more careful there should be a good plenty of wholesome viands, than that any shew of extreme niceness should be visible in the dishes; and as for what he gave to drink, it was chiefly honest ale, of his own brewing, of such fine flavour and strength as was not to be matched, go where you would.

Having passed through an avenue of lofty trees, which led up to the house, admiring as he approached it its fair appearance and antique character, on making known his errand he was ushered by a jolly-looking butler into a spacious stone-floored chamber, lighted with transome windows, the walls of which were garnished with a prodigal assortment of corstlets and helmets arranged in rows, with coats of mail, military jerkins or shirts

of leather, halberts, bucklers, pikes, bills, crossbows, and all manner of the like weapons and defences. An oak-table that went the whole length of the chamber, was covered with smoking viands, brimming black jacks, and full trenchers. The upper and lower messes being divided by a huge saltcellar,—all around was a busy company of friends and retainers, doing honour to the feast; and at the head of the table in a famous tall chair, sat a ruddy, stout, pleasant faced gentleman, with hair and beard white and plentiful; a full ruff such as might have been in fashion some score of years since, and a serviceable doublet, with trunks and hose of a sober colour. The hilt of his rapier came up to his breast, but he held it as carefully as if it had been an old friend, and I doubt not would sooner have gone without his napkin at his meals, than without so approved a companion. He kept discoursing cheerfully with those nighest him, ever and anon glancing his eyes round to see that the carver did his duty, and that all were well served. This was Sir Marmaduke de Largesse.

William Shakspeare had not entered the hall many minutes ere he was spied by the old knight, who in a kind voice bade him come near and state his business.

“Gloves, eh!” exclaimed he pleasantly, upon hearing of his errand. “Hie then to a seat at the table—get thee a good meal and a fair draught—

after that if thou art in the humour, come to me and I will attend thy business with all proper diligence."

There was such sweetness in the behaviour of this old gentleman, that it was impossible for the boy hesitating to do what he was desired, even had he cared not to be of the feast, so he went with due deference below the salt, where place was cheerfully made for him, and every one of his neighbours commenced pressing of him to this and the other tempting dish with such cordiality, as soon put him quite at home with them. A trencher full of excellent fare, he quickly found smoking at his hand so enticingly, that he was fain to set to with exceeding good will, and it was a truly pleasant part of the entertainment to note the anxiousness of his neighbours, that he should have what he liked best, and as much of it as he could fancy. In all honesty he made a famous meal, and after drinking sparingly of the ale, he was ready to attend to his errand. Presently a most thankful grace was said by the chaplain, and in a few minutes the tables were cleared, and all had gone their several ways, save only some guests who kept their places, and continued conversing with their bountiful kind entertainer. William Shakspeare did not move, for he was waiting for some sign from the knight of his being at leisure.

"Prythee let me hear that ballad of William

the Conqueror, thou wert speaking of, Master Peregrine," said Sir Marmaduke to a curious sort of pantaloon looking person, wearing a huge pair of spectacles, mounted on his peaked nose.

"O my life, I doubt hugely I can say but a verse or two," replied Master Peregrine, in a thin small voice. "I heard it when I was a boy, and never since, nor have I met it in print any where, though I have searched wherever there was likelihood of its being to be found. Indeed I would give something to know it thoroughly, for I doubt not tis exceeding ancient, and one of the very rarest ballads that ever were made."

"Let us hear what of it is in your remembrance, I pray you," exclaimed the chaplain, who was one with a venerable worthy aspect, and was then employed in brewing a cup of sack for the old knight and his guests, in the which he was esteemed famous.

"Well said, Sir Johan," said a young gallant, a near kinsman to Sir Marmaduke. "I love an old ballad as well as any."

"Thou lovest a pretty woman better of the two, Sir Valentine, I'll warrant," cried a companion merrily.

"That doth he Sir Reginald, I'll be sworn, or he is none of my blood," replied the old knight in the same humour.

"Well, I care not to deny the impeachment,"

answered his kinsman with a smile. "Doubtless I can con either upon occasion, and get them by heart too if they be worthy."

"Marry, and very properly," cried Sir Marmaduke, and then with a famous arch look added, "I doubt though you would like to have your pretty woman as old as your ballad,—eh, nephew?"

"No, by St. Jeronimo!" exclaimed Sir Valentine with such emphasis, it raised a laugh all round.

"Well, give me an old ballad for my money," cried Master Peregrine with a marvellous complacency, "Methinks there is nothing like the delicate pleasure it affordeth, if so be you stick it on the wall with some of its fellows, and go to the perusal of it when you have a mind."

"There the ballad hath it hollow," observed Sir Johan gravely, yet with a twinkle in his eye that savoured of some humour. "Being of the church, perchance I am not the fittest to speak on so light a matter, but in all my philosophy, I know not of ever a pretty woman who allowed herself to be stuck on the wall with her fellows, were it even for a single moment." This sally also occasioned great laughing, after which Master Peregrine was pressed for his ballad.

"It is of some length, said he; "And if I remember me right, is writ in three separate fyttes or divisions."

Then each of the company listened with cour-

teous attention, Master Peregrine commenced repeating of the verses he had spoken of.

"I regret my memory faileth me in the rest of the verses, for I doubt not they would be found well worthy of a hearing," said the antiquary, suddenly coming to a halt.

"Think awhile—mayhap they shall return to your remembrance," said the chaplain.

"Ay, do, Master Peregrine; for I should be loath to lose any part of so goodly a ballad," added the old knight, who, with the rest, appeared to take infinite interest in it.

"Nay, as I live, I know not a verse more," replied the other, seemingly in some vexation when he found his thinking was to no profit. "Indeed, I should be heartily glad could I meet with the other parts, for they are of a very singular curiousness."

"'Ifaith, I should be well pleased myself to hear the rest on't," remarked Sir Marmaduke, and his guests spoke much to the same purpose.

"An' it please your worship, methinks I can give you every line of it," said young William Shakspeare, who had fidgetted about some time without daring to speak.

"Ha, Gloves! art there?" exclaimed the old knight, merrily; "in very truth I knew not of thy presence. Come hither, I prythee."

"Dost indeed know aught of it, young sir?" inquired Master Peregrine, looking at the boy earnestly through his spectacles, as he approached him.

“Every word, an’ it please you,” replied William.

“Let us hear of it then, and quickly,” cried Sir Marmaduke, putting his hand kindly on the boy’s head. William Shakspeare saw all eyes were fixed upon him; yet there was a friendliness in every aspect which gave him nought to fear. Standing where he was, with a graceful carriage of himself, and a wonderful pleasant delivery, he presently went on with the verses.

“Bravely spoken!” exclaimed the old knight, who had observed and listened to the boy manifestly with a more than ordinary satisfaction in his benevolent pleasant aspect. “Never heard I aught more properly delivered.”

“Nor I, by’r Lady,” said Master Peregrine, in a similar excellent humour. “Where didst learn this exquisite ballad, young sir?”

“An’ it please you, my mother taught it me.” replied William Shakspeare.

“Hast any more such in thy memory?” inquired the other.

“A score at least, an’ it please you,” answered the boy; “most moving ones of the doings of valiant knights; and sundry of a delicates sort, concerning of the love of fair ladies; besides which I have store of fairy roundelays, that I learned of nurse Cicely, which smack most sweetly of the dainty blossoms.”

“O’ my life, thou art a treasure!” exclaimed Master Peregrine, in a most pleased astonishment.

“ Stick him against the wall, I prythee ! ” cried Sir Reginald, merrily.

“ Marry, methinks he is a wall of himself, or at least as good as one that is ever so well covered with ballads,” remarked Sir Valentine ; “ you could not have fallen into more choice company, Master Antiquarian.”

“ So thou art John Shakspeare’s son, of Stratford,” said Sir Marmaduke kindly to him, after he had made the boy say something of who he was ; “ we must be of better acquaintance. Come thou here as often as it pleaseth thee ; and if thou art for books, I have some thou wouldst be glad to be reading of, I make no manner of doubt. I tell you what, my masters,” added he, turning to his guests, “ I have a pleasant device in my head, which perchance may be exceedingly profitable to us all ; and it is no other than to take this good boy with us to Kenilworth, to see the queen’s highness, and he shall entertain us on the road with some of those rare ballads he hath spoken of.”

This suggestion was heartily received by the company, and after being well commended, and received bountiful tokens of good-will from all, William Shakspeare returned home, bearing a message to his father to the effect just alluded to.



## CHAPTER X.

See, she comes :

How sweet her innocence appears ; more like  
To Heaven itself, than any sacrifice  
That can be offered to it.

MASSINGER.

I'll go hunt the badger by owl-light :  
'Tis a deed of darkness.

WEBSTER.

But for to speke of vertuous beautee,  
Then was she on the fairest under sonne :  
Ful pourely yfostered up was she :  
No likerous lust was in hire herte yroune ;  
Ful offer of the wel than of the tonne  
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,  
She knew wel labour, but none idel ese.

CHAUCER.

THE next morning early there was a wonderful stir amongst the neighbours at noting a brave cavalcade enter Henley Street, and stop at John Shakspeare's door, and presently there came out the boy William, whom his mother had carefully dressed in his best apparel, grieving in her heart she had no better to give him, and by his father was set upon an ambling palfrey, that appeared to have been brought for him. All of his acquaintance were grouped about, marvelling famously to see Will Shakspeare riding away in the midst of persons of worship with as great an air with him as he were a lord's son. They could scarce believe their eyes;

but what exquisite sweet pleasure and pardonable pride were felt by the parents, who, after their respectful salutations to the good knight and his company, at their door watched their young son as long as ever they could hold him in sight, sitting his palfrey so gallantly, he was the admiration of all who saw him. I'faith ! it was a thing to talk of for the rest of their days, and the good dame was never known to tire of it.

Away they went ; Sir Marmaduke, his two kinsmen, Master Peregrine, Sir Johan the chaplain, and young William, and some half dozen of the old knight's serving-men, all on horses ; and their passing along the town made the citizens come running out, and the dames were seen lifting up their babes that they might get a sight of good Sir Marmaduke. Nothing was like the respect shewn him wherever he passed, and for all he had cordial greeting, and some kind word or another. Indeed, he was held in especial esteem wherever his name was known, and few there were in the whole country who knew it not, for the old knight was a gentleman of ancestry and blood, of exceeding ancient name, and of large possessions, whereof the greater part had been possessed by his family for many generations. The De Largesses had also held high offices ; had been famous soldiers, prelates, judges, and the like honourable persons, and had ever been known for a fair name and an open hand.

The present possessor appeared to have inherited all the good qualities of his ancestors; and though he was called by no higher name than good Sir Marmaduke, I doubt hugely any prouder title could have become him better. He had never been known to be in a passion; and though ever inclined for a jest, his mirth had no offence in it at any time. There sat he as stout of limb as of heart, on a noble grey horse, sleek coated and well limbed, ever and anon patting his graceful neck with some commendable speech, which the poor brute beast took as proudly as though he knew the value of such behaviour from so respected a quarter.

On each side of him rode his kinsmen in all the bravery of the times. They had gone to the wars in their youth, and though still scarce upon manhood, Sir Valentine being but twenty, and his cousin Sir Reginald five years his senior, had shewn such valour against the enemy that they had received knighthood. The first was full of fine chivalrous notions, as became his soldiership; and would have dared all manner of great dangers to have gained the kind opinions of fair ladies, as became his manhood. Of the inestimable sweet pleasures of love could he think by the hour together; and when he took to his gittern, doubtless it was to breathe forth some soft lay learned of him in France of the gallants there. Yet of a most honourable heart was he, as became a true lover;

and his rapier was ready to leap out of its scabbard at the bruit of wrong done to any woman. He was of a clear transparent skin, whereon the delicate moustache had already come to some conspicuousness, and the sharp outline of each fair feature had such fineness as was exquisite to behold. Eyes had he in colour like unto a bright sky in harvest time, and his hair was of a soft rich brown, that grew in waving folds over all his head and neck.

Sir Reginald was more manly-looking; darker in complexion, hair, and beard; less delicate in his notions; more free in his speech; and was as ready for loving any pretty woman, yet did so with an indiscriminateness which the other never affected. Both were strict friends, as they had proved in many a time of need in the hour of battle, and both were alike honourably disposed, and of unblemished reputations. These two young gentlemen rode their palfreys like gallants, putting them to their prettiest paces one against the other, and ever and anon turning round their handsome cheerful faces, with one hand holding the back of the saddle, and the other reining up their gamesome steeds to see how their sport was relished by their kinsman, who it may well be believed took it very pleasantly, for he was ever an encourager of any innocent pastime that served to make happy the passing hour.

Behind them, a little way, rode Sir Johan, the

chaplain, who would sometimes jog on alongside of his good patron, discoursing very soberly concerning how bountiful Providence had been to the surrounding country, seasoning his speech with such learning as did not savour of pedantry. For all this he was not indifferent to a jest on any proper occasion. Right well could he laugh at one himself, and with as much aptness furnish one for his company. Indeed, he was one of those rare divines who take upon them to think that whatsoever good thing may be met with, is provided for our especial enjoyment, and that to dislike them argueth utter ignorance, a wonderful lack of discretion, and a most unwarrantable and absolute ingratitude. Therefore Sir Johan was never seen with a long face and a miserable preaching. His orthodoxy was evidently of a most comfortable sort. It agreed with him exceedingly, and sat on his round cheeks after a fashion that must have been wonderfully enticing to all wretched fosterers of schism and heresy. Yet was he no Sir Nathaniel, but his very opposite. It is true he would eat and drink heartily at all reasonable hours; but then he never forgot to give as hearty thanks, and always conducted himself on such occasions with a creditable decency the other was far from shewing. Nothing was like the vigour of his piety after he had enjoyed himself to his heart's content; and the eloquence, the learning, and the zealousness with which he would then

dilate upon the marvellous goodness of Providence, carried conviction to all hearers. His scholarship would have become a bishop, though he was nothing but a poor master of arts; nevertheless, he was content with his station, and like a wise man enjoyed to the full whatever honest pleasures it brought within his reach.

By his side usually rode Master Peregrine, in an antique suit that might have belonged to his grandfather; in his figure an admirable contrast to the full proportions of the worthy chaplain; and he talked to the latter, or to the boy riding between them, when he could not get the other as a listener, as if he could never tire at it, of old books and ballads, their histories, contents, character; form and complexion. Indeed, he seemed familiar with every thing that had been printed since the invention of the art. The very talk of a rare book would put him into a rapture, and a ballad that was not to be met with he would think more precious than gold. Then he would speak in such choice terms of Chaucer, and Gower, and Wyatt, and Surrey, and a many others, as though none could be of so great account; but when he got to the speaking of ballads, nought could exceed the delectable manner in which he dilated upon them, in especial of such as were of a by-gone age.

William Shakspeare, as he rode between these two last, learned more of books than he had known

all his days before. Nothing could be so pleasant to him as such discourse. He listened with such earnestness as was the admiration of his companions, and asked questions so to the purpose, that they were never indisposed to answer him. More and more delighted was he to hear such famous books might be met with as those notable classic authors, both Greeks and Latins, Sir Johan spoke so learnedly on, and those exquisite sweet poets and romancers Master Peregrine mentioned so lovingly; and he was quite in an ecstasy when they promised to make him better acquainted with their worth at such times as he chose to visit them at Sir Marmaduke's mansion. So rode he along in his neat suit of frolic green, as much at his ease as any of the company, till he was called upon to furnish their entertainment, as had been designed; and then he unfolded his store of ballads, and Master Peregrine assisted him with such particulars of their history as had come to his knowledge, that all allowed so proper a companion for a journey they could never have met with.

On they proceeded in this orderly manner till they came to the town of Long Ichington, some seven miles distant, where my Lord of Leicester had erected a tent of such capaciousness and grandeur, never was seen the like; and here it was intended to give her Majesty a truly magnificent banquet, previous to her departure to his Lordship's

famous Castle of Kenilworth she was coming to honour with a visit. Now it should be known to all, the Earl of Leicester was in especial favour of the Queen, his mistress. No man more so, and as her Majesty, in one of her progresses at that time, had given him assurance she would do him such honour as to make his castle her residence for some little while, he had busied himself with prodigious expenses to make becoming preparations. This visit of the Queen engrossed the public talk, and as a knowledge of the splendour of its accompaniments got abroad, the inhabitants of the adjacent neighbourhood became the more impatient to behold them. As for my Lord of Leicester, he was diversely reported; some asserting there was not his like for a prodigal disposition; and others, though they cautiously mentioned the matter, spoke of him as one who held no discipline over his passions, save before those who could punish him for his misdoings; and that he scrupled not to use his great power to the furthering of any great wickedness he had a mind to.

Be this as it may, our young traveller and his worshipful company, after seeing all at this town they could get a sight of, departed towards the evening, with her Majesty and an immense concourse of her loyal subjects, to the Castle of Kenilworth. There, at her first entrance, was beheld a floating island on a pool, made bright with a many



torches, whereon sat the lady of the lake with two nymphs, who, in very choice verse, gave her Highness a famous account of the history of that building, and its owners. Close by was a Triton riding on a mermaid, at least some eighteen feet in length, and also Arion on a dolphin. The Queen passed over a stately bridge, in the base court, on each side of which, upon tall columns, were placed a store of all manner of delectable gifts, supposed to come from the Gods, such as a cage of wild-fowl from Sylvanus, sundry sorts of fruits from Pomona, great heaps of corn from Ceres, vessels of choice wine from Bacehus, divers kinds of sea-fish from Neptune, warlike appointments from Mars, and instruments of music from Phoebus: which rare conceit was much relished of all, and shouts rent the air as her Highness took note of them.

All this afforded wonderful entertainment to William Shakspeare; but his marvel became the greater, when he beheld the infinite variety of such things which met him at every turn. He could never tire of admiring the rare beauty of that stately castle carved out of the hard quarry, the magnificence of such of the chambers as his companions got him access to; and the ravishing beauty of the garden, with its bowers, alleys, obelisks, spheres, white bears, with the ragged staff, the armorial bearings of the lordly owner, exquisite flowers and delicious fruits, that met him go which way he would. Again

was he in a great pleasure at sight of a cage of some twenty feet, the outside garnished with all manner of shining stones, the inside decked with fresh holly trees, and furnished with cavernous places, where a multitudinous collection of foreign birds of all parts had been collected; and also, at beholding the grand fountain in fashion of a column made of two athletes, back to back, supporting a huge bowl, which, by means of certain pipes, did distil continual streams of water running, where a plenty of lively fishes were disporting of themselves, along side of which were Neptune, with his trident and sea-horses; Thetis, in her chariot and dolphins; Triton, in company with his fishes; Proteus, herding of his sea bulls; and other of the like famous emblems, set in eight different compartments, with admirable sculpture of waves, shells, and huge monsters of the deep, with the ragged staff in fair white marble at top, and gates of massy silver for entrance.

But the sports that were then and there enacted for the Queen's pastime, none could have so relished as did he, especially the chase with the savage man, clad in ivy, and his company of satyrs; the bear-baitings and the fire-works, the Italian tumblers, the festival of the brideale, and the games of running at the quintain and morrice dancing. Beside which, to his great diversion, he witnessed the Coventry men playing the old play of Hock Tues-

day, representing in a sort of tilting match, and in dumb shew, the defeat of the Danes by the English, in the time of King Ethelred, the which so pleased her Majesty, that she bestowed on the players two bucks, to make good cheer with, and five marks in money, to garnish the feast; and after supper, the same evening, he was taken into the castle, to see a play of a higher sort played by men better approved in their art, that was then writ, and played for her Majesty's particular delectation; and though it lasted two long hours, he was so enamoured of the manner in which it was set forth, he would have been glad enough to have stayed all night, had they not come to an ending.

All this, and a wonderful deal more of splendour, pageantry, and pastime, was continued in infinite variety for nineteen days, with such prodigal feasting and rejoicing as none had previously been acquainted with; and the entire of it good Sir Marmaduke took care his young companion should see, during which he had him as well lodged, and as carefully provided, as if he had been his own son, he was so pleased with him; and either he, Master Peregrine or Sir Johan, explained the character and purport of such things as he knew not of, so that he reaped both pleasure and profit wherever he went. Every thing was to him so new and strange, that he was kept in a continual state of pleasurable excitement he had never known all his

life before—even the choice excellence of Gammer Gurton's needle was eclipsed by the singular fine recreation he was then enjoying.

It did sometimes happen that although he strove all he could to keep with his company, they would get separated in the throng, and then he would have a great deal to do to find them again; and once, after the old knight had promised he would take him to see her majesty, of whom he had not as yet got a sight, because of the crowd of nobles that were ever around her, a sudden press of persons going in a contrary direction set them so far asunder, that in a few minutes the boy found himself in a place where there were many turnings, of which it was impossible to say which might be the one his friends had taken. Believing he was not like to gain the required knowledge by asking, where such a multitude of strange persons were assembled, he chose a path with the determination of seeking all ways till he found the right one. He wandered up and down the green allies, greatly admiring the deliciously various trees, bedecked with apples, pears, and ripe cherries, the beds of blushing strawberries, and the plots of fragrant herbs and flowers, which cast beauty and sweetness wherever he walked, yet of his friends saw he not the slightest sign; indeed, he had gone so far he at last met with no person of any kind. Getting to be somewhat bewildered at searching so long with such

small profit, upon turning round a corner he came suddenly upon a lady and gentleman, with a grand company at some distance behind. The gentleman was most gorgeously apparelled. Nothing could be so costly as the rich satin embroidered with gold and jewels that formed his cloak, save the delicate fabric of his doublet, wherein the same glorious magnificence was apparent. A massy gold chain of a curious fashion, hung over his breast—gems of price glittered on the handle of his dagger—his sword seemed wrought with the like preciousness—his hose were of the delicatest pink silk, woven with silver threads all over the upper part of the leg where they joined the trunks, which were of crimson and orange colour prettily slashed and richly embroidered like the sleeves of the doublet. The rest of his appointments corresponded with what hath been already described, and being of a fine make and somewhat handsome countenance, they became him infinitely. He appeared to be playing the gallant to his fair companion, for there was an air of exceeding deep homage and admiration in the looks with which he regarded her.

The lady was attired in a full robe of white satin ornamented with rosettes in great number,—in the midst of which was a pearl in every one,—trimmed with the richest lace. A ruff of lace still more costly lay in folds upon her neck, surmounted by wings of stiffened lawn, set all round with pearls.

Her hair was combed from the forehead, and pearls of a very large size set in it, with a great shew of other jewels equally precious; but pearls appeared to be a favourite ornament, for besides what have been mentioned, they were in her ears,—they were round her neck, and upon her bosom,—a long string of them hung down to her stomacher,—and they were worked into the material of her dress wherever there was place for them. She was of a fair complexion, well featured, though she could not be called in her youth, of an agreeable aspect, and of an excellent stately deportment, and appeared to be listening with singular satisfaction to what fell from the gallant at her side.

“What ho, my young master, what seekest thou?” exclaimed she, upon noticing of William Shakspeare standing looking at the two, as if so dazzled with the brave shew they made, he knew not at first whether to turn back or go on; but believing them to be persons of worship had taken off his hat, and stood respectfully to let them pass.

“An’ it please you I have lost my way,” cried he. “I have been forced to part from my friends, by reason of the great crowd, and should I not overtake them soon, perchance I may miss seeing the queen, the which famous sight they were proceeding to when I was forced away from them.”

“Hast never seen the queen?” enquired the

lady, seemingly charmed with the ingenuousness of the boy's manner.

"No, indeed, I have not, by reason of the throng about her," answered he. "But I should be right glad to see her, for never yet have I seen a queen of any kind, and I have heard say our Queen Elizabeth is a most gracious lady." At hearing this the lady looked at her companion, and he at her, with a peculiar smile, doubtless of some pleasant manner.

"And suppose I shew thee Queen Elizabeth my little master, what wouldst say to her?" asked she.

"Nay, I would say nought of mine own accord," said the other, "as methinks it might savour of a too great boldness in me; but asked she of me any question, I would with all proper courtesy answer as I best could,—and doubt not I would thank you heartily for affording me so brave a sight."

"By my troth, well said!" exclaimed the lady, as if in an excellent satisfaction. "What say you, my Lord of Leicester, shall we shew this youngster, that speaks so prettily what he has such huge desire to see?" added she, turning with an arch look to her gallant.

"O' my life, to my thinking he deserveth no less," replied the nobleman.

"An' it please you," said William Shakspeare

respectfully, "it seemeth to me you must needs be the queen yourself!"

"Ha, young sir! and why dost fancy that?" exclaimed Queen Elizabeth, for as the reader may readily believe, it was no other.

"Because you have so brave an appearance with you," answered he, "and look so gracious withal. Indeed, an' you are not her in truth, I should be well pleased an' you were, for never saw I so excellent sweet a lady."

"Indeed! But thou playest the courtier sometimes, my pretty master!" cried her majesty in an admirable good humour.

"And the varlet doth it so gracefully!" added my Lord of Leicester, who seemed to be as much taken with him as was his royal mistress.

"Here is a remembrance for thee," said the queen, giving him a gold piece out of her purse; "I do applaud thy wit in having made so notable a discovery; and doubt not, if thou goest on as well as thou hast commenced, thou and Fortune will shake hands anon!"

Then calling to some of those her officers who were behind her, her majesty gave the boy to them with strict charge to seek out his friends, and deliver him to them safely; but it so happened he had not proceeded far in such custody, when he met them; and all were in some marvel to hear what strange adventure he had fallen into.



It was getting towards eve of the same day, when two persons stood close under the terrace that lay along the castle. One was closely muffled up, and endeavouring all he could to hide his face and person from observation, and he kept continually turning of his eyes in every direction to note if any were watching, whilst he spoke in a low voice to his companion. The other was also cloaked, but seemed more intent upon hearkening to the discourse of his associate than to any other matter.

"Art sure of her person?" asked the first in a low whisper.

"I marked her well, my lord," answered the other in the same subdued voice; "O' my life, never saw I so exquisite fair a creature!"

"Indeed she is of ravishing perfections—a very angel in the bud!" exclaimed his companion in a fervent ecstasy. "Fresh in youth and perfect in beauty! in brief, I have never seen her peer in all my experience. Do as I would have thee, thy fortune's made."

"Count upon her as your own, my good lord."

"But be cautious, on your life."

"Be assured, in subtlety I will beat the cunningest fox that ever robbed hen-roost."

"Away! I cannot stay another minute, or my absence will be marked." Whereupon both glided different ways in the shadow, and were no more visible.

Among the company the fame of these princely pleasures had attracted to Kenilworth, were Sir Thomas Lucy and his good dame, who had brought with them, as an attendant to the latter, no other than their pretty foundling, the gentle Mabel, now grown to be that indefinable delicate example of feminine graces that lieth betwixt girlhood and womanhood. Under the careful instruction of her patroness, she had been well schooled in all such learning as was proper for a young person of such humble fortunes: but of her own natural well-disposedness she acquired such wisdom as would have fitted her had she come of the noblest families. Of her parents none knew a syllable; and Dame Lucy fancying none but mean persons could behave so meanly as to desert their child, had brought her up in such fashion as shewed she considered her origin to be of the humblest, intending her for a servant, and ever attempting to impress on her mind a humility corresponding with one meant for so pitiful a condition. However, having resolved she should to Kenilworth in their company, the good Dame had taken care her attire should be of a better sort than what she usually wore, never failing the whilst she gave them for her wearing, to accompany them with a notable fine homily upon the wickedness of poor girls seeking to put on them such apparelling as was above their station.

Mabel was that evening standing between her

elderly companions beholding the fire-works. There was a huge crowd a little way before her. A strange gallant very courteously directed the attention of the knight and his lady to what was worthiest of notice, and in a very friendly manner gave them intelligence of what was going to be done, at what cost it had been made, and by whose skilfulness it was constructed ; to the which, Sir Thomas Lucy in especial, gave famous attention, entering cheerfully into the discourse, and striving to appear as familiar with the matter as his instructor.

“ I warrant you ! ” exclaimed he ; “ methinks I ought to know something of such things. Ay, marry, I have been as familiar with them as am I with my hand.”

“ As I live, I took you to be some learned gentleman when I had first sight of you,” cried the stranger, with an appearance of monstrous respect ; “ you have it in your face, sir ; indeed your look savoureth so much of sagacity that none can mistake it. Doubtless you are some great Doctor ? ”

“ O’ my word, but a simple knight o’ the shire, good sir,” replied the other in a famous satisfaction.

“ And a justice of peace, Sir Thomas,” added Dame Lucy, anxious her husband’s greatness should not be imperfectly known.

“ I would have sworn it ! ” exclaimed their companion.

“ By’r Lady now, is it so visible ? ” cried the

other, as much astonished as gratified. "But, as I was about saying, when I was at college I was wonderfully given to the study of chemicals and alchemy; ay, to such extreme that I make no manner of doubt I should have got at the philosopher's stone had I kept at my experiments long enough."

"Of that I am assured," observed the stranger.

"But my chief pleasure was in the making of strange fires that would burn of all colours," continued the knight. "These I learned of a famous clerk, who was studying chemicals, and was considered more apt at it than any of his time."

"A very Friar Bacon, doubtless, Sir Thomas," said his companion.

"Marry, yes, that was he," replied the justice. "Now, I was ever a letting off my fires, to the terror of all simple people, who could not fancy they were of this world, and marvellous proper sport had I on such occasions; for, as I live, I was such a fellow at tricks I had not my match, go where I would."

"I would I had known you then; I was just such another," exclaimed the stranger, very merrily.

"Ay, it would have done your heart good to have seen the tricks I have played," continued Sir Thomas, laughing with exceeding heartiness. "I have been as wild a colt as ever broke his tether, I promise you."

"No, indeed, have you?" cried the other, joining in his companion's mirth to some excess.

"By cock and pye, yes; and among the bonarobas too," added he, in a voice and manner meant to be still more facetious, as he gave his companion a sly nudge at his elbow.

"Odde my life, Sir Thomas!" exclaimed the stranger, apparently increasing the greatness of his humour, "you were a fit companion for the Sophy."

"I was as familiar with them all as though we had been cousins," added the knight, after the same fashion. "Indeed I was so partial to these pretty ones, that if any of my fellows said, 'Yonder is a kirtle,' off would I start on the instant, though I had a mile to run."

"Fie, fie, Sir Thomas!" exclaimed Dame Lucy, good humouredly; then turning to the stranger with a monstrous innocent sort of countenance, added, "Think not so ill of him, good sir, I pray you, for I have known him this thirty year and more, and he hath never done ought of the kind, I'll warrant."

"I doubt it not, believe me," replied the other, with more sincerity than he chose should be known. "But if it please you to come a little more to this side," said he, with exceeding courteousness, "you shall behold what is far beyond what you have already seen."

"We will, and thank you," answered Sir Thomas,

eagerly, and he with Dame Lucy, presently moved in that direction.

In the mean while, another courteous gentleman was paying similar attentions to the fair Mabel, who received them in a thankful spirit, as she ever did any appearance of kindness from another. He told her the wonders of the castle—the great power and princely magnificence of the possessor—what famous noble lords and fair ladies were of the company, and the unparalleled preciousness of the jewelled silks and velvets that were of their wearing; and he took care to season all with some delicate flattery or another, well suited to win the ear of one of her youth and inexperience.

“Indeed these nobles have a fine time of it, methinks,” said her companion. “They have every thing that heart can wish for, at their command; and any fair creature who is so fortunate as to win the love of such, cannot help knowing that extreme happiness few have any notion of. Dost not think women so fortunate are greatly to be envied, sweetest?”

“Doubtless, honourable sir, if they be worthy,” replied Mabel.

“Crowds of servants come at their command,” continued the stranger, more earnestly. “Whatever they can fancy, let it be of ever such cost, is brought to them ere they can well say they want it

—the exquisitest sweet music fills the air around them day and night—all manner of ravishing perfumes of flowers and herbs and odoriferous gums, enrich the atmosphere they breathe; and he whose princely nature they have so bound in their chains as to hold him prisoner to their admirable lustrous eyes, is ever at their will, glorifying them with his praise, deifying them with his devotion, and making every hour of their lives redolent with the unutterable ecstasies of his sovereign and most absolute affections. Dost not think such women infinitely fortunate?"

"I know not how they could help being so, were they well disposed," answered the foundling.

"Just so, sweetest one," observed the gallant. "Now, supposing such thing as this should happen:—some such noble person as I have described—the equal of the proudest—the master of the wealthiest, getting sight of your own most absolute graces——"

"What, I?" exclaimed Mabel, in a famous astonishment.

"And straightway falling enamoured of the bright perfections of your spotless nature," continued he; "his princely heart thrilling with the divinest sensations, should be in a feverish impatience to cast his greatness at your feet, and all out of love for such inestimable choice beauty of mind and fea-

ture, should be ready to fall out with life, if by chance you deny him the happiness he would find in your inestimable company."

"Surely you are jesting, good sir," observed his fair companion. "I know not of such things as you speak of. Indeed, I am so humble a person, none such as you have said, would ever trouble themselves about me for a single moment: nevertheless I thank you kindly for your good opinion of me, and should be right glad to possess any merit that would make me deserve it better than I do."

"That cannot be, o' my life, excellent creature!" replied the gallant, with a seeming fervour. "'Tis your too great modesty that preventeth you from seeing your own notable divine excellences."

"Indeed you think too well of me—I have no sign of any such thing," said Mabel; her truly unassuming nature shrinking from the flattery; then looking round, for the first time observed that Sir Thomas and Dame Lucy were no where near her. "Alack! where can they have gone!" exclaimed she, in some to do. "They will be exceeding angry I took not better heed to keep close to them wherever they went, as they told me."

"Speak you of your friends, sweetest?" enquired the other, in an indifferent manner. "I saw them myself not a moment since, moving round this way. If you will allow of my protection, I will take



care you join them so soon you shall not be missed at all."

"I should be loth to put you to such trouble on my account, I thank you heartily," answered his fair companion, "I will seek them myself, the way you have kindly told me." Thereupon she moved in that direction, the gallant keeping at her side, but not a sign of the knight or his good dame could they see.

"Woe is me, I have lost all sight of them!" cried Mabel, now in no little trouble of mind. "How heedless I must have been to have let them go away without my knowing it."

"Surely there they are, yonder!" exclaimed the stranger, pointing to two figures dimly discerned at the top of one of the green alleys, walking slowly away.

"Indeed they have some likeness to them," she replied, yet seeming to hesitate about their identity.

"They cannot be any other, I would swear it," said the gallant, with monstrous earnestness; "see you not the knight's very doubtlet? nay, an' you do not make some speed, they will turn the corner, and mayhap you may lose sight of them altogether." Thereupon Mabel, without another word, tripped lightly along the path—her companion still keeping close to her side—and when they got to the top they beheld the two persons they had seen turning

round a corner into an alley beyond; at the sight of which the poor foundling started off again, in great anxiety to overtake them, but with no better success; for, however fast she ran, as she got to the end of one path, the figures were seen turning round at the end of another, and so it continued for such a time she would have given up the pursuit in despair, had not the gallant kept encouraging her to proceed. At last, when she was nigh exhausted with her exertions, and in extreme discomfort, because now she saw no appearance whatever of those she took to be the knight and his lady, on a sudden she heard a loud whistle behind her, that appeared to come from her companion,—the which it did beyond all contradiction, for he had that moment put a whistle to his mouth,—and ere she could think what was the meaning of such strange behaviour, two or three stout fellows rushed from a grove of trees close at hand, and, despite of a sharp scream she gave, threw a large cloak over her, in the which she was muffled up in a minute, and borne helplessly along.

“Never was hawk lured so cleverly,” said the gallant, in evident gratification at the complete success of his villainous scheme.

“She is now hooded, and must to her mews with what speed we can. Slight!” here sharply exclaimed he, seemingly in a very absolute vexation; “what pestilent interruption is this?—But

they are but two, so haste, for your lives, we can give them work enough, prove they for meddling."

It so happened that Sir Valentine and his friend were together in an adjoining walk, when they heard the whistle, and the scream following close upon it; their rapiers were out in an instant, and they were just in time to see a female muffled up and borne away. This brought them to the spot presently. Two of the villains carried Mabel, and were making off, whilst their companions were engaged with the young knights, who were using their weapons briskly with each an opponent; but coming suddenly to the rest of Sir Valentine's party, led by Sir Marmaduke, who had plucked out his trusty rapier, the moment he heard the clashing of blades, his imposing appearance struck a panic amongst them. The two fellows dropped their burthen, without caring to make his acquaintance, and, with the rest, made off in different directions.

It was difficult to say which was most affected with the unusual loveliness of the gentle Mabel, Sir Valentine or Sir Reginald, as they disengaged her from her unwelcome covering, whilst the others assured her of her perfect safety. They were dumb with excess of admiration. Nothing they had seen or imagined came in any way like the exquisite innocence and faultless loveliness of her features. She seemed to them to be some fair spirit of a better world—such as ancient poets have described

haunting clear streams and mossy caves, and the deep hollows of the emerald woods, by such names as sylphs, dryades, and the like. Woman she could scarce be styled, she looked so young, and yet each was loath she should be called any other name, believing nothing was so worthy of love and reverence. As for the poor foundling, she was in some confusion to be so gazed upon by strangers; she had not yet recovered from the surprise and fear she had been put to by the treachery of her late companion, and gazed about her, the prettiest picture of amazement that had ever been witnessed. Even the antiquarian stared through his spectacles at her as earnestly as he had at the ancientest ballad that had fallen into his hands; and William Shakspeare, boy as he was, appeared as though there was a power in her admirable beauty he felt all through his nature, yet with a confused sense of its particular meaning, that would take no definite interpretation. It is here only necessary to add, that the young and graceful creature found every possible attention and respect from those in whose company she had so fortunately fallen. A search was quickly commenced for the knight and his lady, and after some trouble, taken of the young knights as the sweetest pleasure they had ever enjoyed, she was restored to them, but not without such thanks from her, as, for the gentle sweet graciousness with which they were accompanied, never left their me-

mories from that time forward. As for William Shakspeare, he returned to his loving parents, surprising them greatly with the goodly store of gifts, he would needs pour into his mother's lap, which had been bestowed on him by his friends; but putting them in a still greater wonder at his marvellous relations of what strange adventures he had had, and famous sights he had beheld, since he had been away.

## CHAPTER XI.

His brown locks did hang in crooked curls,  
 And every light occasion of the wind  
 Upon his lips their silken parcels hurls.  
 His qualities were beauteous as his form,  
 For maiden-tongued he was and therefore free.

SHAKSPEARE.

For him was lever han at his beddes hed  
 A twenty bokes, clothed in black or red,  
 Of Aristotle, and his philosophie,  
 Than robes riche, or fidel, or sautrie.

CHAUCER.

Oh, ye gods,  
 Give me a worthy patience! Have I stood  
 Naked, alone, the shock of many fortunes!  
 Have I seen mischiefs numberless and mighty  
 Grow like a sea upon me? Have I taken  
 Danger as stern as death into my bosom,  
 And laughed upon it, made it but a mirth,  
 And flung it by. \* \* \* Do I  
 Bear all this bravely, and must sink at last  
 Under a woman's falsehood!

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

“NAY, I cannot abide these new fangled novel-  
 ties,” observed Master Peregrine, who with the  
 others of the squire’s company, with William Shaks-  
 peare in the midst, appeared to be examining of  
 certain shelves of books that were in an antique  
 oak chamber in Sir Marmaduke’s mansion. “They  
 be but for the delighting of dainty ears, and such  
 whose fantasies are only to be tickled with fine

filed phrases. I like not the boy should have such poor reading."

"I assure you the *Mirroure for Magistrates* is in excellent repute of all men," said Sir Reginald. "It is a very admirable fine poem, or series of legends, relating the falls of the unfortunate princes of this land, first originating with my Lord Sackville, and now carried on by divers authors of reputation."

"Nay, I have here one that he will more approve of," cried Sir Valentine, as he held a volume in his hand that looked quite new. "It is called the *Paradyse of Daynty Devises*, aptly furnished with sundry pithie and learned inventions, devised and written for the most part by Master Edwards, sometime of her majesties chappell; the rest by sundry learned gentlemen both of honour and worshippe. It is full of delectable poems I promise you, that are read and hugely admired by all persons of quality."

"I doubt not," said the chaplain, who had also a book in his hand. "But methinks I have something here far more fitting, of the ingenious Master Tuberville, being no other than *The heroicall Epistles of the learned poet Publius Ovidius Naso, with Aulus Sabinus' answers to certaine of the same—a very famous and proper classic.*"

"What have we here?" cried the old knight, examining a volume he had just taken off the shelf.

“A hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie, as I live, and very profitable reading doubtless.”

“Pish, what wants he with books of such a sort?” enquired Master Peregrine impatiently, as he regarded with particular satisfaction a huge folio from the same place. “This is such as he will like most. O’ my word it is a treasure beyond all price. This great rarity is entituled, A book of the noble Hystories of Kynge Arthur, and of certeyn of his Knyghtes,” and is from Caxton’s own press, and bears the date anno 1485. O what a jewel!—O what a pearl of price! In good fay I can scarce take my eyes off such an inestimable rare volume.”

William Shakspeare turned his intelligent eyes from one to another, as each recommended his particular book, almost puzzled which of these goodly volumes he should choose first, but in a wonderful impatience to be at one of them.

“Methinks after all, ’twill be best to let him make his own choice,” observed Sir Marmaduke. “What say you, young sir,” said he to him. “Which of all these books think you the properest for your reading?”

“An’ it please your worship,” replied William, with much simplicity, “I must needs read them all before I can say which is best, with any justice.”

“E’en do so then, if it likes you,” exclaimed the old knight, laughing heartily with the rest. “There are they—you are welcome to their peru-



sal come when you will. But there is one volume I would have you take great note of, and that is called *The Gentleman's Academie*, or the *Booke of St. Albans*, writ by one Juliana Barnes, containing the choicest accounts of hawking, hunting, and armorie, I have met with any where."

"Truly, 'tis a most ravishing work!" said Master Peregrine. "A notable rare specimen of the types of *Wynkyn de Worde*. But if you be for grave reading, choose you *The Seven Wise Masters*. If you are for mirth, pitch upon *The Hundred Merry Tales*—if for the reading of other light tales, nought will so well serve your turn as *The Palace of Pleasure*. Take you to romances, you may find exquisite diversion in *Amadis of Gaul*, *Palmerin of England*, *Huon of Bordeaux*, *Sir Bevis of Southampton*, *Sir Guy of Warwick*, *The Seven Champions*, *Valentyne and Orson*, *The Squire of Low Degree*, *The Knight of Courtesie*, and the *Lady Faguel*, *The Castle of Ladies*, and a hundred others of equal great merit;—but if you are for ballads, my young master, exquisite choice ballads and songs of old time, look you out for the *Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, *Queen Dido*, *Fortune my Foe*, *Pepper is Black*, *Adam Bell*, *Clym of the Clough*, and *William of Cloudesly*, *Robin Hood* and the *Pindar of Wakefield*, and others out of all number of every kind, subject, and quality, which are here ready for your reading."

“All such are well enough in their way,” observed Sir Johan. “But if he take not to reading of the classics, all other reading whatsoever advanceth him not a whit in his education. What can he learn of ancient history, save out of Herodotus, Thucydes, Zenophon, Titus Livius, Tacitus, and Cæsar; where in philosophy can he have such guides as Aristotle, Socrates, Epicurus, Euclid, that famous master of figures; Pliny, that curious observer of nature, and Celsus, that profound expounder of surgicals. In poetry what is like unto the works of Homer, Pindar, Anacreon, Virgil, Horace, or Ovid. And in eloquence what can come in any way near unto Demosthenes, or Cicero. Truly then the classics should be before all other books, for the study of any young person, and so it will be found in all colleges and schools throughout Christendom.”

These advocates for modern and ancient learning, might have waxed warm in their dispute, had they been allowed, and the two young knights also took part in it in praise of chivalrous tales, Italian sonnets, and French lays and romances; but Sir Marmaduke good humoredly put an end to the argument by telling them the dinner bell was a ringing, which caused them to forget their books awhile, and look to their appetites.

Thus it will be seen that William Shakspeare was bountifully provided for in all manner of learn-

ing, and it may well be believed he was not long in availing himself of the treasures so liberally placed at his disposal. All spare time he could get was passed in the old knight's library, where he kept like a bird in a granary, feeding on the plenteous store in a most grateful spirit, and with no desire to move from such excellent neighbourhood. But he was rarely left alone for any great period, for Sir Marmaduke and his friends were too well pleased with his quickness of apprehension and untiring industry, not to do all in their power to assist the studies of so promising a scholar : therefore he was sure to have with him either the old knight himself, who would readily go over with him any creditable book of legends, or ancient customs and sports ; or his chaplain, who took huge pains he should not be indifferent to the treasures of classic lore, never forgetting by the by to put in on an occasion, some most moving discourse on the goodness of Providence, and explain the chief points of all moral doctrine. Then came Master Peregrine ready to cuddle him with delight, should he find him intent upon some worn eaten black letter folio, or a bundle of old ballads, and he would not rest till he had made his pupil familiar with whatsoever concerning of them he thought worthy of knowing—and at another time he would be visited by the two young knights with whom he was in particular esteem, and they were ever striving to possess him

with the notion that the gallantest accomplishments were the most worthy of study, especially of the Italian tongue, and that nought was like unto the sweetness of Petrarch, the pleasantry of Boccacio, or the grandeur of Dante, Tasso, and Ariosto.

From this it is evident on the face of, that none could have a fairer schooling than our young scholar. Indeed, he now gained more knowledge in a day than he could have had of that pedantic, poor ignoramus, his schoolmaster, all his life; and it was the marvel of all to notice how famously he got on in his learning. There appeared to be nothing he could not give a reason for, or description of, for he took infinite trouble by asking questions of all sorts of people, as well as by conning of every book in Sir Marmaduke's library, to remain ignorant of as little as possible. Hour after hour hath he passed at a time over some pithy book, till his head would ache with the intentness with which he would give his mind to the matter of it—then away went he like a wild buck of the forest, broke loose from confinement, over the green fields and through the nutty woods, hither and thither everywhere, drinking within his nostrils, choked with the closeness of musty volumes, the sweet pure air freshened with the cool breeze—and at his aching eyes, tired of the sameness of so much paper and print, taking in with as greedy a draught the pleasant greenness

of the teeming soil, and the delicate soft blue of the expanding heavens.

Some how or another it happened, that he often found himself thinking of the beautiful fair creature he had seen rescued by his friends from the hands of villains, when he was enjoying the princely pleasures of Kenilworth. In his solitary musings, whereof after any deep study, he had of late taken to, her radiant features would suddenly glide into his youthful mind, like as a sudden burst of sunshine pierceth the leafy branches of a young tree; and all his thoughts took a character of such brightness on the instant, as shewed there was some power of brilliancy in her image that made resplendent its whole neighbourhood. This to him was both new and strange. The forms of beauty of which he had had experience, and they were by no means few, had given him delight—most exquisite delight—but here was something presented to him of a totally different character—of a most singular admirable loveliness; and the pleasure he derived from its observation he felt to be of a far more exquisite sort than he had known heretofore. The varied dies of the delicatest flowers peeping from their vernal coverts—the tall monarchs of the forests, bending their haughty heads to the rude wind—the soft mingling of field and wood, hill, stream, and valley, bathed in their mellow tints, that made up the

ravishing fair landscape—the glorious shew of unsurpassed magnificence, visible at the sun's rising and going down, which clothed the skies, like an oriental conqueror, in a garment of purple and gold, and the more graceful splendour of the quiet night, when earth's unrivalled roof seems as though carved all about with the likeness of a goodly almond tree, as 'tis seen at eve, with its verdure deepening into a dark blue, spread over in every part with myriads of silvery blossoms—he could enjoy with such huge zest as hearts attuned to sympathy with the beautiful can alone have knowledge of; but in the outward lineaments of this novel sign of the presence of nature's unrivalled handiwork, there appeared such moving graces, that plainly shewed the masterpiece confessed; and he had some glimpses, in the delicious raptures which an increasing familiarity with his mental perception of the beautiful promised him, of that marvellous deep meaning which lieth most manifestly in the choicest and perfectest shape in which our bountiful mother hath given it a dwelling.

Let none feel incredulous of what is here put down. Though still in years apparent, but of an unripe boyhood, the child had in him the greatness of the man in embryo. Take you the bud, examine it narrowly, you shall find in it a miniature-tree, perfect in all its parts; or the bean—as its sides have opened to shew some promise of what it will

be—and behold all the characters of the plant minutely visible to your close inspection! Nature never varyeth from her first original type. In all things that promise a profitable increase, the power is folded up in the germ, where, despite of disadvantages, it will gradually unfold itself, till the character she hath put upon it is perfectly developed to all men's eyes. Could we look into the immaturity of any of those great ones, whose mental fruits have been the nourishing diet of every age that hath passed since they flourished, be sure that we should find at such early period, the very appearances and manifestations of their after perfection, as are here imperfectly described concerning of William Shakspeare. As for beauty, it is the very sunshine of the soul, without which shall the seed of greatness lie dormant as in a perpetual frost; but directly it beginneth to make itself felt, out come stem, root, and leaflet, with such goodly vigour, that in a presently the brave plant putteth out its branches so lovingly, nought can resist its progress; and lo! in a little while, what numberless rare blossoms appear, manifesting in themselves the quality by which they were created.

But our young scholar was not the only one on whom the attractions of the gentle Mabel had made a powerful impression. Sir Valentine, and his friend, oft spoke of her to each other with exceeding admiration, to which if in his company, the

boy would listen with a flushed cheek and a throbbing heart, seeming to be poring over his book,—but this he had as clean lost sight of for the nonce as if it and he were a hundred miles apart.

“She is, indeed, a delectable creature!” exclaimed Sir Valentine, as they three were together in the library. “She seemed a being just stepped out of some French romance, one of the virtues perchance, or better, some incomparable damsel, possessed of them all in her own fair person, who was about falling into the hands of a powerful ogre, or other monstrous villain that is a foe to chastity, when we two knights going about to redress wrong and defend oppressed innocence, each for the honour of chivalry and his liege lady, stepped up to her rescue, and by the help of our valour, quickly delivered her from her enemies.”

“A most moving picture,” cried Sir Reginald laughingly; “I would give something to see it done in tapestry.”

“O’ my word, ’twould be a fine subject,” said his friend, with some earnestness; “I doubt not, too, of especial profit to the gazer; and I would have it worked in this sort. There should be yourself, and I, your approved friend and companion in arms, giving two of the villains furious battle; and in a little way off our brave kinsman—another famous pillar of knighthood—shall be putting to flight the other two rascals away from their expected



victim, who shall be lying prostrate under a tree, where she hath been left, in a very moving tribulation. A little way from this we will have a second picture, with the villains making off in the distance—the lady now in a pretty fright and bewilderment, looking about her with Master Chaplain, Master Antiquarian, and our young scholar, as country persons natural of those parts, gazing at her with exceeding curiousness, whilst her three valiant champions shall stand, leaning on their weapons, as though they were amazed at beholding such heavenly grace in so pagan a place.”

“Never heard I so brave a limner!” exclaimed the other in the like pleasant humour; “why thou wouldst beat the cunningest master of the art out of the field. O’ my life, in thy hand the painted cloth would be more moving than history; and we should speedily have all lovers of true valour, instead of seeking the enemy’s encampment, studying lessons of knighthood from thy arras.”

“Well, I should be right glad to know what hath become of her,” said Sir Valentine. “I like not parting so quickly with so rare an acquaintance, I promise you. Nevertheless methinks ’tis marvellous such a strange person as that Sir Thomas Lucy should have so exquisite a daughter. Had he been in any way civil I would have bestowed some pains to please him, shrivelled pippin as he looks to be; but he spoke so sharply to the gentle creature, and looked

at us with so crabbed an expression, that I was in haste to be quit of his company; therefore I have been in perfect ignorance up to this date where she is to be found."

"I have at least discovered the old fellow's residence," said Sir Reginald.

"Ha, indeed!" cried Sir Valentine in a famous exultation. "Perdie, that is excellent news. Where doth the pagan place so fair a jewel? Tell me, I prythee, for I would impawn my heart to get but another sight of her."

"Marry, but I think 'tis impawned already, good cousin," observed his friend with an arch smile. "Thou seemest so monstrous eager on the matter; but not to baulk thy exceeding curiousness, for my humour jumps with it, believe me,—know that this peerless damsel hath her bower at Charlcote, where the knight of despite, her father, holdeth his court."

"To horse, for Charlcote ho!" exclaimed his young companion, rising from his seat in a merry manner, as if impatient to be gone.

"But let me advise thee of sufficient caution," said his kinsman, with an admirable mock gravity; "great dangers beset thy path. Ogres, giants, basilisks, and dragons await thee on every side. Horror will cross thy steps; despair dog thy heels; revenge cometh on thy right hand, and cruelty on thy left. By my valour, sir knight, methinks thou hadst best refrain from so perilous an adventure."

“*Amor vincit omnia!*” replied the other after the same pleasant fashion; and thus jesting and bantering, the two friends a few minutes after, left our young scholar—who had drunk in every word of their discourse—to pursue his studies in solitude. Little more of the book before him attempted he acquaintance with for some time before and long after their leaving him. He thought, and the more he thought the more thoughtful he grew; but his thoughts were as gossamer webs hovering over a field, that catch nought but other webs of a like sort; they appeared moreover to have no purport; they went in no direct path; but proceeded over and across, around and about, always returning to the starting point,—and what should that be but the same fair creature he had seen at Kenilworth, that the gay knights had talked of in such delicate terms.

In the meanwhile, at all proper intervals, he assisted his father as far as in him lay; at other times running of errands with an alacrity and cheerfulness none could help admiring. John Shakspeare strove all that an honest man could to keep his family in comfort. He would seek to do a little in his old trade of wool, and also something as a glover; but though thrift and diligence were twin companions with him at all times, the expenses of a family would often run him down at heel. Perchance, however desirous he might be to pay as he went, and no man more so, it might

happen when the baker called there was no money. Mortgaging a small property brought him by his wife carried him on a little ; but this could not last for ever, do what he would ; and it became no uncommon thing when he was ready for his dinner, to have no dinner ready for him. His neighbours were ever willing to lend him a helping hand ; but having experienced their friendly feeling in some measure, he liked not letting them know he required it again, fearing to exhaust their goodness. All that our young scholar gained by friendly gifts was presented to his parents as speedily as he could : and be sure he felt more exquisite gratification in so bestowing it, than he experienced in any other thing whatsoever ; but it sometimes happened when he was at Sir Marmaduke's, or other bountiful friends, before a goodly meal, the thought that his loving parents had at that time nothing of the sort to put before them, would so move him he could not touch a morsel of any thing, however tempting it might be. And as for his good mother and father, they cared more their son should keep a decent appearance, so that he might do no discredit to his company, than they heeded their own comforts.

Methinks there cannot be in nature so truly pitiful, and yet a sight so noble withal, as an honest man struggling with adversity. Note how he labours to bear up his heart against the crushing

weight of his stern necessities. See his nature—a proud nature, perchance, for there is no pride like that of honesty—reduced to the mean resorts of poverty's most absolute rule. Behold the fallacious smile and abortive cheerfulness under which he would strive to hide the iron entering into his soul ! Want winds her serpent folds around him, and eats into his vitals ; Ruin hovers over him on vulture's wings to seize him for her prey ; Disgrace points at him ; Shame follows on his steps ; and Fear seeks to disturb the pleasant shelter of his dreams ; but the honest man holds up his head like a flag upon a wreck ; and, when that rude villain Death would take the wall of him, doffs his beaver with a natural dignity mere gallantry can shew no example of.

Such was it with John Shakspeare. He did his best, but his best failed. He put forth all his strength, but all his strength was insufficient. The brand of poverty appeared to have marked him for her own ; but worse than that to him, he saw his wife pining, and his children wanting nourishment. In such a state of things it might have been thought that he would have made application to some of the persons of worship in his neighbourhood, whose characters were a guarantee it would not have been made in vain ; but worthy persons when they fall to those poor shifts as render such an act necessary, are found monstrous loath to trouble

the rich and powerful with their necessities. Sir Marmaduke doubtless would have very readily done him such service ; but he had no intimation his assistance was required ; William Shakspeare always making such an appearance, by means already spoken of, which prevented him from entertaining any suspicions his father was in any other but comfortable circumstances ; and the poor glover, however meanly off he might be, could never bring himself to hazard his son's prospects with so great a friend by importuning of the latter with his own hapless condition.

At last, after a protracted struggle with himself on the matter, and things getting to wear a more serious aspect, he made up his mind he would venture to move his old friend John a Combe. Strange rumours had been afloat for some time concerning of this good gentleman. On a sudden he had been missed from Stratford, and after some years stay, had again returned—but oh, how altered a man ! Those who saw him scarce knew him, and those whom he saw he seemed determined he would not know. It was said there were such marked lines in his pallid countenance, as though a thousand cares had ploughed their furrows in the flesh, and that when he walked abroad, which was something rare in him, he would mingle with none, greet none, be known of none—but move slowly along, with his body bent, and his eyes fixed sullenly on the

ground, sometimes moving of his lips—though what fell from them none could say. It was also reported that he had become an usurer—lending of his money at exorbitant charges, and being exceeding strict in forcing the payment. Not a word of this would John Shakspeare believe. What, that noble heart become a selfish solitary, he had known of so social a spirit—or that generous nature debase itself with avarice, he had seen risking the horriest death out of pure philanthropy ! It was clean impossible. They must most grossly belie him who reported of him any such meanness. So thought the poor glover of his old acquaintance, and with these thoughts he one morning took his staff in his hand and proceeded to his dwelling.

At his first entrance at the gate John Shakspeare saw that there was at least a notable change in the house once so familiar to him. Every thing around and about it looked strange and desolate, and as opposite to the state in which it used to be kept, as any two things could chance to be. The fair garden that once was the pride of the place for its order and trimness, appeared now a mere heap of weeds, straggling bushes, and withered plants. The goodly trees that were wont to be so well trailed against the wall, had broke from their bindings, and lay with their straggling branches almost leafless, with the unchecked ravages of vermin and neglect. The dwelling seemed no less wretched. A

broken casement, and a porch dirty and crumbling with decay, spoke how little outward appearances were now cared for by the possessor. John Shakspeare shook his head at noting of these things. It then occurred to him that some fearful change must have taken place in John a Combe, else John a Combe's dwelling could never have come to so pitiful a condition.

The door was cautiously opened by a sour looking slovenly old dame, instead of the neat pretty handmaid, and active young serving man, that had used to have been so ready to shew a visitor all proper courtesy, and after sharply interrogating him on his business, she led him through the hall—where every thing spoke a similar story of indifference to all comfort and cleanliness, as did the ruined garden and delapidated porch—into a small back chamber choking with dust. Here before a heap of many papers and parchments, sat his worthy and esteemed friend Master Combe. John Shakspeare looked with greater intentness ere he would believe his own eyes. He saw before him a man he knew to be in the pride of manhood, with all the externals of decrepid age. The grey hair, the blanched cheek, and the sunken eye, could not be mistaken ; but besides these unwelcome signs, there was in his aspect a mingled expression of agony and distrust, that was more moving than all. John Shakspeare's honest heart sunk within him, as he



beheld this painful spectacle which exhibited the more wretchedness, by the mean habiliments in which it appeared,—for he who had used to dress in so becoming a fashion, he was admired of all, was now attired in coarse clothes and uncleanly linen, unworthy of a person even of the lowest quality.

Master Combe stared at his old friend without the slightest sign of cordiality, or even of recognition ; and seemed as though he would have him say his errand without delay ; whereupon his visitor though more distressed at such a moment at the condition of one he had known to be so good a man, than his own, presently gave an unvarnished tale of his losses and sufferings, and the stern necessity which had compelled him to ask a loan to afford him some present help. Master Combe sat the tale out with a stone-like indifference.

“What security hast got?” said he at last, rather sharply.

“None,” replied his visitor, much pained at hearing of so unexpected a question.

“What, come to me seeking of money without security !” exclaimed Master Combe, as if in a monstrous surprise. “Dost not know I am an usurer, and dost not know usurers lend not, save on sure grounds and profitable terms ? I must have ten in the hundred, and I must have something to hold upon of such value as will ensure the safety of the loan.”

“Alack, I have it not,” answered John Shakspeare, marvelling the generous nature of his old companion should have taken so ill a turn. “I expected not you were so changed, else I would not have troubled you.”

“Changed !” cried the other with a bitter emphasis. “Marry, yes, and a goodly change it must needs be. What, wouldst suppose I would remain all my days the generous confiding fool I have once been? Have I not given without stint—have I not endured without flinching for the good of my fellows, and none ends else? Lived I not in the strong belief of the excellence of humanity, and sought all means to shew I was myself a parcel of the whole? What good thing have I left undone that was in my power. Where have I failed in the exercise of an impartial benevolence? When gave I not every one his due, or kept myself back when one unjustly used required a defender?”

“Never, as I gladly testify,” exclaimed his companion.

“And what hath been my profit?” enquired Master Combe, still more bitterly, as he rose from his seat in an increasing excitement; “hopes blighted, health ruined, and happiness destroyed! Look on me—see you one particle of what I was! Yet is the change without, in no comparison with that which is within. My whole nature is blasted, riven and torn up by the roots. Not a green leaf shall you

find on it, search where you will. Not a sign of any goodness whatsoever. An earthquake hath trampled on me—a pestilence hath eaten up all the pure essence of my being—what is human of me is stifled, poisoned, crushed, and cast out of all likeness with humanity. I am a moving desolation—a living desert—a well that the scorching air hath left dry as a stone.”

John Shakspeare looked on and listened, quite forgetful of his own wretchedness.

“See you that spider in the crack?” enquired Master Combe, suddenly taking the other by the arm.

“Ay, I see it plain,” replied he, looking narrowly to the spot pointed out.

“He is spinning his web in the ruin around him,” continued his companion, as if in some sort of exultation. “He means to make prey of all he can. John Shakspeare, I am intent upon a like thing,” added he, sinking his voice to a mere whisper. “Take heed of yourself, else you will find yourself in my snare. To the door with what speed you have.”

John Shakspeare, so moved he scarce knew what he was about, took up his cap; but, finding it feel unusually heavy, looked in it with some narrowness, and there, to his great surprise, saw a purse of money.

“How came this here?” exclaimed he, taking it

in his hand. "As I live, there was nought of the kind in my cap a moment since, when I laid it down."

"How should I know, i'faith?" cried Master Combe, sharply.

"It must needs belong to you, worthy sir, for it cannot be mine," said his companion, seeking to give him the purse.

"Marry, what new folly is this!" exclaimed the other, putting it away. "Dost think I would give thee such? Doth usurers part with their money after such fashion? Fanciest I would allow of thy spreading the rare intelligence amongst thy acquaintance, that John a Combe is as monstrous a fool as ever he was, and liketh nought so well as helping some one in his need? Go get thee gone, John Shakspeare," added he, pushing his companion to the door, "thou art honest, and must needs be a fool—thou hast no lack of virtue, therefore cannot escape being taken for a knave;" and in the next moment the door was closed upon him.

## CHAPTER XII.

Over my altars hath he hung his lance,  
 His battered shield, his uncontrolled crest,  
 And for my sake hath learned to sport and dance,  
 To coy, to wanton, dally, smile, and jest.

SHAKSPEARE.

Take heed, sweet nymph, try not thy shaft,  
 Each little touch will pierce a heart;  
 Alas! thou know'st not Cupid's craft,  
 Revenge is joy, the end is smart.

DAVISON.

But what on earth can long abide in state?  
 Or who can him assure of happy day?  
 Sith morning fair may bring foul evening late,  
 And least mishap the most blessed alter may?  
 For thousand perils lie in close await  
 About us daily to work our decay,  
 That none except a god, or God him guide,  
 May them avoid or remedy provide.

SPENSER.

“I THINK it exceeding improper of thee, Mabel!”  
 exclaimed Dame Lucy, with a countenance of more  
 than ordinary gravity, whilst she walked in the  
 grounds appertaining to her husband's mansion at  
 Charlcote, in all her pride of farthingale and head-  
 tire.

“What else could I do, I pray you, dear mis-  
 tress?” said the fair creature, in a deprecating tone,  
 following of her closely. “These good gentlemen  
 would needs speak with me, and surely there was  
 no offence in their speech.”

"O, monstrous offence! beyond all doubting," replied the dame. "Thou canst have no conception, child, what offence may be in speech without it being visible. There are meanings in words that are horrible to think of, albeit they appear of ever such innocency."

"I took it but as a mere greeting," added her companion, in some surprise at what had fallen from the other. "They were infinitely kind in their enquiries; and so courteous withal, it is hard to believe anything uncivil of them."

"Trust not to such kindness," said her mistress, somewhat oracularly, "'tis a poor stale to catch woodcocks. I marvel what such fine fellows should want of so poor a person! No good, by my fay! Doubtless, would they seek to fill thee with foolish fantasies improper for thy humble station, and so turn it to their advantages. But methinks I have given them a right proper reception. I shewed them such dignity of behaviour as proved how little I thought of them and their fine words. They will not come here again, I'll warrant."

"Dost not think, dear mistress, 'twas marvellous good of them to rescue me from the hands of those rude persons who were for taking me away, I know not where, whilst we were at Kenilworth?"

"Nay, o' my life, I know not," replied the dame, "I cannot speak of that of which I have no certain knowledge. Perchance, if the truth could be come

at, more mischief would be found in those who stayed thee, than in those who were for carrying thee off. I liked not their looks. They have a horrible suspicious appearance with them."

"I saw it not, believe me," said her young companion. "Indeed they did appear to me the noblest, kindest, honorablest young gentlemen, it hath ever been my good hap to meet."

"Tilly vally, stuff o'nonsense, child!" exclaimed Dame Lucy, with some sharpness. "Marry, how shouldst know aught concerning of honorable young gentlemen; and what dost want with such? Prythee hold thy silly prate. Thou wilt have enough to do to get thy bread with an honest name, without troubling thyself with any such improper matters. Honourable young gentlemen, forsooth! The world must be clean topsy turvy when persons of thy quality take to such notions."

The poor foundling was silenced, and the two continued their walk without ever a word more; yet though her tongue was at rest, her thoughts were right busy. Obedient as she was, and yielding as was her nature, nothing of what her companion had said, had convinced her, the handsome gallants who had so bravely rescued her from she knew not what peril, and that, after so long a time—hearing where she lived, had gone on purpose to enquire how she had fared after her great alarm—had treated her with such extreme courteousness, were anything but

truly noble gentlemen, who meant her well. Doubtless it was something new to her to be treated with delicate respect by persons of quality, as they appeared; for she was only regarded as a servant, and only associated with such, save at those times she was attending of her mistress; therefore the impression they made upon her might have been more powerful than could have been produced under ordinary circumstances. Women in general, and especially of the younger sort, who have been used to be meanly thought of, are wonderfully grateful for any slight courtesy from a superior, and are ready to give all their hearts for such attentions, should they believe them to be sincere; and Mabel, whose gentle nature was overflowing with gratitude at any kindness, took, at the most liberal appreciation, the attentions of the two young knights.

Certes Mabel continued to think very kindly of Sir Valentine and his friend, and was famously glad she had met with them again; for ever since she had first formed their acquaintance, she had wished she might see them once more, and now she had a second time beheld them, she hoped it might chance they would again meet. She thought not one whit more of one than of the other; she felt she should desire to be well esteemed of both. In accordance with such feelings, whenever she could get away from the old dame for a walk by herself, she would direct her steps towards the spot where she had last



met her brave deliverers. Mayhap it was chance which led her that way; but as it occurred every time she was for a stroll in the park, methinks it was of that order of chances which savour marvelously of design. But it so happened these walks of hers ended as they had commenced. She met not those whose company she desired, and she began to think such great pleasure could never be hers again.

Some months after the interview to which allusion hath just been made, she was returning homewards from her ordinary ramble, somewhat out of heart at her many disappointments, when, to her wonderful great exultation, she suddenly espied Sir Valentine wending his way towards her through the trees. The young knight made his greeting with all the courtesy of a true soldier, gazing with most admiring glances on the fair creature before him, who, to his thinking, had grown to be infinitely more beautiful even than when he had last had sight of her; but the truth was, she was now all smiles, gladness, and animation—happiness was beaming in her sunny glances, and pleasure basked in the soft hollows of her radiant cheek. Such sweet simplicity, such genuine truth,—so artless and unworldly a nature Sir Valentine had had no knowledge of; and he, whose truly chivalrous disposition was so ready to take on trust the admirable qualities of woman, could not fail to appreciate

such excellences as he now held in his personal acquaintance. He looked as though he could never tire of such exquisite company. His handsome smiling features spoke what absolute satisfaction he was then and there enjoying; and the longer he stayed in her bewitching presence, the less inclined appeared he to take himself away from it.

As for Mabel, nought in this world could equal the exceeding pleasantness she experienced in listening to her companion's soft mellow voice and polished delivery, describing to her such of the princely pleasures of Kenilworth she had not beheld. She entirely forgot she was a poor despised foundling, and in her fantasy accompanied her eloquent companion through all the glorious pageant-ries, noble banquets, and courtly recreations, that were enjoyed by the noble company at the castle, as though they had been her customary and most familiar pastimes, from the beginning of her earliest remembrances. I question she would have been as properly entertained with the reality of what she heard, as was she with their mere narration; but when the narrator digressed from his subject in any manner, to express, with winning civilness, his great comfort at having been so fortunate as to have made her acquaintance—which he thought more of than could he a thousand Kenilworths—a thrill of exquisite rapture seemed to pass through her whole nature, and she would return her thanks for such

estimation with a heartiness that shewed clearly whence it proceeded. This continued as they remained strolling carelessly along under those shady trees, without taking the slightest heed of time, till the thickening shadows gave them warning how long they had dallied with the hours. Then some sign of separation became manifest.

"Let me beg one favour at your hands, ere I depart from your sweet presence," said Sir Valentine, as he was still lingering by her side near the park gate.

"In truth, good sir, I would grant you anything in my poor power," answered his fair companion.

"It is but to know your name," added he.

"O' my word now, good sir, have you not known it all this time?" enquired she, as if in some little surprise. "Surely I am no other than Mabel, of whom all persons, methinks, have some knowledge."

"Mabel!" repeated the young knight, somewhat to himself as it were, yet all the time gazing on the ingenuous countenance of his fair partner, as though he was conning it for some pleasant task,—then added, with a deep expression in the words, "I will not forget it."

"But, I pray you, give me knowledge of *your* name!" exclaimed Mabel, with a most pressing earnestness, "an' you think it not over bold in me to ask such a thing of you; for in very truth, I should be exceeding glad to know it."

"I am called Valentine de Largesse," replied he, charmed with the exquisite fashion in which the question had been put to him.

"How good a creature!" said the gentle girl to herself, as she was returning home after he had left her. "Valentine de Largesse! 'Tis a name that meaneth all honourableness and true valour, I will be bound for't. How strange of Dame Lucy to think there could be evil intent in any such!"

This was not the only meeting they had under those shady trees. Sir Valentine was too well pleased with his last interview not to desire to repeat his visit, and in consequence of his friend Sir Reginald being absent in a distant part of the country, he had such leisure as enabled him, when all other circumstances concurred, to realise his own wishes as often as he would. His behaviour began imperceptibly to take upon it the character of that tender gallantry, with which it was customary among the more chivalrous sort of gentlemen, to address their sovereign lady. His homage knew no bounds—his respect was equally without limits, and his admiration, though the powerfulest of the three, was of that choice sort which is shewn more in delicate actions than in a fair commodity of terms. These attentions gave the gentle Mabel a pride in herself she had never experienced before, which increased as she grew more familiar with them. As it made progress did her simplicity diminish;

and she presently took such things, albeit they had once been so new to her, as if they were what she looked for, and was properly entitled to receive.

Yet did this pride sit upon her as gracefully as it might upon the noblest lady in the land. When at her humble duties, she was no more to all appearance than a poor foundling; but after tiring of herself with such genuine taste as to make her poor apparel look more becomingly on her, than regal garments would on many others, she stood by the side of Sir Valentine receiving his devotions, with so courtly an air as made her seem quite another creature. Her step was firm, her brow erect, her carriage stately, and her look spoke of such proud happiness as a noble maiden might experience in attracting to herself the exclusive attentions of some princely gallant. At such times it was evident she had lost all knowledge of her humble fortunes. Indeed her behaviour was of such a sort her companion not only had not the slightest suspicion she was of so low a station—but he more and more marvelled such unmannerly strange persons as Sir Thomas and Dame Lucy appeared to him—could have so noble a daughter. Mabel never gave the matter a thought, else, had she suspected any such thing, her ingenuous nature would have led her to undeceive him on the instant. She was gratified with his company out of all doubt, but she saw nothing beyond the present moment; and although

these meetings were clandestine, and, as she had good reason for believing, against the consent of the old knight and his lady, as there appeared no offence in what she did, she could not see she had done any.

It was her good fortune during all this time to escape suspicion at home—for her well-disposedness was so familiar to them that her conduct was never enquired into, and as her great trouble and annoyance, young Lucy, was at college, she was in the enjoyment of more happiness than she had known her whole life long. Pity such felicity should be of such short endurance. But so is it ever—nothing is certain save uncertainty, which sheweth its troublesomeness just at those times we are least prepared to put up with it. Often and often is it we see in the sweet spring-time of the year, a goodly tree almost hid beneath its innumerable fair blossoms, giving such prodigal promise of fruit as maketh the owner's heart leap with joy—a frost cometh in the night, the blossoms are nipped, shrivelled, and cast off, and the tree remaineth with nothing but barren branches for all that season. Methinks the knowledge of this should keep the sanguine from too steadfast an expectation; but what availeth all knowledge against disposition?—a score of times shall such meet with the terriblest disappointments, and the next day shall find them hoping, trusting, and anticipating, with greater

.

earnestness than ever. This, however, could not be said of Mabel, for she anticipated nothing; and, as hath been said, looked only upon the present moment. She was scarce of an age to trouble herself much about the future, and the extreme humility of her fortunes kept her from anything that savoured of ambition. The innocency of her heart was her best buckler in this apparent lack of foresight. Proud she was it cannot be denied, but her's was the pure essence of pride, and not the dross.

As she was returning from her usual stroll, though without meeting with her usual gratification, she came upon a sight which fixed her attention so profoundly she could not stir from the place. It was in the pleasant twilight of the first month of autumn when the heated air fanned by the seasonable breeze was growing to a pleasant coolness, and the rustling groves were donning their embroidered livery. Over head was all of a clear grey save in the west a rich copper hue was visible at the verge, gradually fading till it took the colour of the surrounding sky. The herbage was crisp and short, and the flowers had got to be of some rareness. Low upon the mossy lap of the venerablest oak in the whole grove, lay a youth in the most absolute perfection of youthful symmetry. Surely he might without any great stretch of fancy, have been taken for that lovely boy who playeth such vagaries with our humanity, as poets feign; and she, who crept

to him on tiptoe with such a marvelling, pleased, and cautious look upon her exquisite fair features, would have made an admirable representative of that divine creature the spiritual Psyche of the same ideal world. He slept—one arm supporting his head from which the hat had fallen, the other holding an open book. And who could this be but the youthful Shakspeare wearied out with the long deep studiousness he now, more than ever indulged in. She however had no knowledge of who it was, but could not help gazing with a pleasant wonder upon the pale thoughtful brow, and delicately beautiful countenance of the young sleeper.

All at once the expression of her features changed exceedingly. She now looked all fear and terrible anxiety. The cause of this was she beheld a hornet hovering over his face, seeming every moment as if it would alight on the half closed lips, whose luscious richness of colour doubtless tempted it thereto. Mabel was in an agony of dread that the touch of the insect would cause the young student to start, and so he would get stung: and she dared not seek to wake him from a like fear. So there stood she, bending forward with extreme anxiousness, and anon shrinking back with horrible affright. This continued for some moments, with increasing alarm on her part, when with such a lively sense of joy as had visited her but seldom,



she beheld the hornet take its departure without doing of any mischief. She lingered a moment longer, half inclined to wake the sleeper, and tell him of his danger, but as she could not bring upon herself to break such sweet slumbers as he appeared to enjoy, she presently turned away and continued her walk.

She knew not all this while that she was narrowly watched by two persons, who, creeping from tree to tree with such cautiousness as might prevent their approach being noticed, followed her closely as she went.

"'Tis her!" whispered one, drawing close to the other.

"Let her get to the next clump of trees, and then upon her," answered the other, in the same low voice. They then separated again, and crept along as before till they had passed the sleeper some paces, and were rapidly but cautiously advancing upon the object of their so much regard, when Mabel turning round to take a last glance at the sleeping student, to her monstrous surprise and alarm, found two strange men close upon her footsteps.

"I pray you come with us, sweet damsel," said one of them, whom she immediately recognized as her treacherous gallant at Kenilworth. "We will do you no sort of harm should you come quietly—

for we are of your friends, anxious to lead you to such great good fortune as falleth to the lot of few. But if you shew any unwillingness," added he, seizing her firmly by the wrist, seeing she evinced an evident reluctance to be of his company — "Or make any outcry, we shall be forced to use such means to compel you, as you would find of the roughest."

"Unhand me, sirrah!" cried Mabel, indignantly, striving to free her arm from his hold. "I have seen enough of you to wish for no further acquaintance, and will go with you on no account."

"Then we must e'en take to making you, sweetest," replied he, catching her up in his arms, as though he would carry her away, which set her to screaming and struggling with all her might. At this moment, awakened by the scream, the youthful Shakspeare started from his sleep, and to his extreme consternation beheld the fair object of his most pleasant dream borne away from him, struggling in the arms of some rude villain.

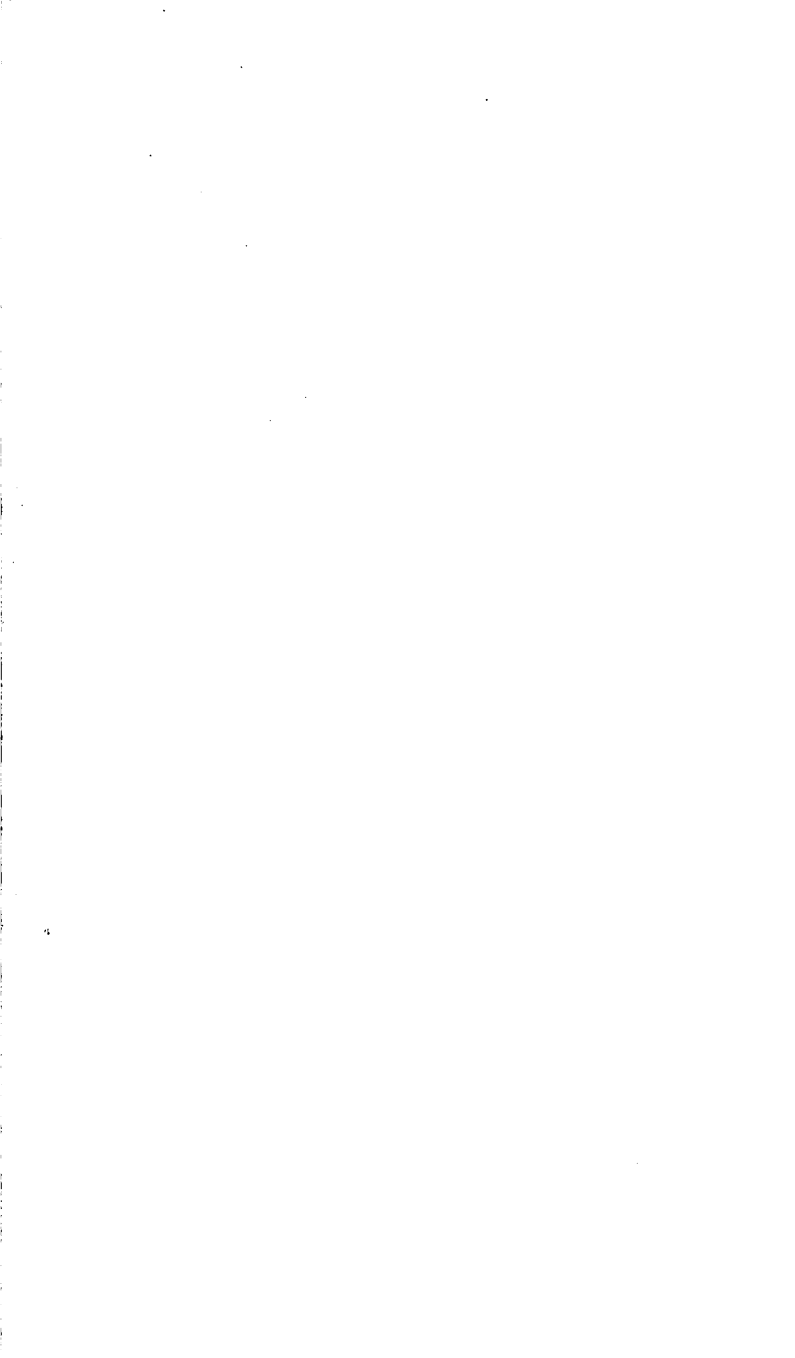
"Hold, caitiff, on thy life!" shouted he, starting after them, with such speed of foot as soon brought them within his reach, but just as he had bravely seized the ravisher by the collar of his doublet, he was felled to the earth by a blow from a heavy riding whip the other villain had with him. The two then made what haste they could with their

burthen, despite her cries and resistance, till they came to their horses under some adjoining trees. The gallant got on one holding Mabel before him, then when his companion was mounted, both rode across the country, at a pace which speedily took them out of sight of that neighbourhood.

END OF VOLUME I.









JAN 17 1939

